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Charlotte Lee

## The Energies of Activism: Rethinking Agency in Contemporary Climate Change Activism

This thesis is concerned with the energies of activism, and uses an exploration of the concept of ‘energy’ to rethink the agency of activism, rethinking: what counts as an act, who counts as an actor, and in particular *how* action is produced in activism. This process of rethinking brings recent theorising around agency more broadly, specifically in relation to non-representational theory, the more-than-human, and affect, into conversation with the practice of activism. The empirical aspect of this research involved three case studies of UK climate change activism, each of which demonstrates a particular form of activism: activism in the form of ‘direct’ action through the protest camps of Camp for Climate Action, activism as a more mundane and regular part of life through the meetings and events of a Transition Town group, and activism as a lifestyle in itself through the low-impact living and building practices of the Lammas eco-village. The methodology involved an immersive participatory approach consisting of periods of observant participation, alongside in-depth interviews with activists, the material from which was then developed into immersive narratives (Summers-Effler, 2010). These narratives aim to illuminate: the role of the more-than-human (Bennett, 2010) in the act of activism, and that emotions and affects are not simply “straightforward ‘prompts’ for activism” (Horton and Kraftl, 2009: 17) in line with emerging activism literature, but instead, alongside the human, the more-than-human, and the act of activism itself, emotions and affect are part of the ‘conditions’ (Ahmed, 2010) for action in activism. In this research, rather than action being literally and linearly produced, the potential for action emerged as a process of aligned and openness to action, and therefore always pivots on the *relations* between elements rather than the properties of a single element or actor.

The Energies of Activism: Rethinking Agency in Contemporary  
Climate Change Activism

Charlotte Elizabeth Lee

PhD

Department of Geography

Durham University

2013

# Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Statement of Copyright	ix
Acknowledgements	x
Dedication	xi
1 Introduction: The Agency of Activism	1
The Carnival of Climate Chaos	1
Unravelling the Carnival of Climate Chaos	2
The Act of Activism	5
The Actor of Activism	9
The Production of Activism	12
The Energies of Activism	14
Structure of the Thesis	16
2 The Act of Activism: Capacity and Mobilisation	22
Engaging the Geographies of Activism	27
The Capacity to Act	35
The Act of Mobilising	44
Conclusions	48
3 The Energies of Activism: Potentiality, Affect, and the More-than-Human	50
(Re)Establishing Emotions in the Activism Literature	53
Action: Action and Energy	58

	Relations: Affect and Energy	65
	Space: Energy and Space	77
	Conclusions	83
4	<b>Methodology: Exploring and Presenting the Energies of Activism</b>	<b>85</b>
	Bridging the Non-Representational and Activism Research divide: Developing a non-representational activist approach	89
	Choosing ‘the field’: Identifying the Case Studies	94
	Acting in the field: Methodological practice in the fieldwork	104
	Ethics in the field: ethics in activism research	125
	Conclusions	128
5	<b>Spaces of Activism: Spatial Arrangements of the Climate Camp</b>	<b>131</b>
	Setting up Camp	135
	Swopping onto the Camp	136
	Negotiating the Camp Layout	142
	The Wellbeing Space	150
	Encounters with Wellbeing	152
	Wellbeing: containment and living attention	157
	The Neighbourhood Meetings	162
	Sitting in Circles	164
	Circles: exposure and enclosure	168
	Conclusions	175

6	Doing Activism: Visioning, Building, and Inhabiting the Future	177
	Futures and the Transition Group	181
	Visioning: imagining and drawing the Future	184
	Visioning the Future: Energy and Potentiality	187
	Futures at the Lammas Eco-village	194
	Building the Future: Liming and Lathing	195
	Building Futures Energy and Matter	200
	Inhabiting the Future at the Climate Camp	207
	Living with the Future at the Climate Camp	208
	Preparatory and Playful Acts at the Camp	212
	Conclusions	219
7	Activist Relations: Humour, Music, and Playful Protest	222
	Humour in Transition Meetings	227
	Humorous Breaks: Warming to Each Other	228
	Humorous breaks: collective experiments	232
	Music at the Lammas Eco-village	237
	Circle Dancing and Singing at the Volunteer Week	238
	Musical compositions and decompositions	241
	Playful Protest at the Climate Swoop	246
	Swooping Around the Power Station	247

Subversive atmospheres	253
Conclusions	258
8 Conclusions:	262
Bibliography	278
Appendices	297

## List of Illustrations

	Figures	Page
1.	Waiting for the march to begin (photograph: Nick Chan)	2
2.	The Pink swoop group (photograph: authors own)	137
3.	The entrance to the Climate Camp (photograph: Mike Russell)	138
4.	The welcome speech is about to take place (photograph: Amelia Gregory)	139
5.	The camp's first night (photograph: Kristian Buus)	142
6.	The plan as it began (photograph: Amelia Gregory)	143
7.	The plan after the camp has become established (photograph: authors own)	145
8.	The plan in its final form (photograph: authors own)	145
9.	The clutter around of the Welcome Tent (photograph: authors own)	148
10.	The wellbeing tent's sign (photograph: authors own)	152
11.	Poster in the welcome tent (photograph: authors own)	154
12.	The signs on the wellbeing tent (photograph: authors own)	156
13.	Introduction to the camp (photograph: Mike Russell)	163
14.	The straw bale amphitheatre at the entrance (photograph: Kriptick)	164
15.	“Automobile anonymous” (photograph: Transition group)	185
16.	Tesco apology (photograph: Transition group)	186
17.	Bike lanes (photograph: Transition group)	187
18.	Image from the cover of <i>The Transition Handbook</i> (Hopkins, 2008)	192
19.	<i>The Transition Handbook</i> cover image reversed (Hopkins, 2008)	193

20.	The liming trowels (photograph: authors own)	195
21.	My section of the liming (photograph: authors own)	196
22.	The other volunteer writes “Hi” in their liming (photograph: authors own)	198
23.	Outside of the barn showing the scaffolding I used to work on, and my lathing contribution (photograph: authors own)	200
24.	Piles of materials outside the front of the barn (photograph: authors own)	205
25.	Clutter of materials and tools inside the barn (photograph: authors own)	205
26.	The cube canvas (photograph: authors own)	212
27.	The Mass Action Game (photograph: Amy Scaife)	215
28.	The Mass Action Game (photograph: Mike Russell)	215
29.	A mini version of a roundhouse roof made of beer mats (photograph: Sylvia)	239
30.	The burning embers of the campfire (photograph: Sylvia)	240
31:	The looming cooling towers of Radcliffe on Soar power station (photograph: authors own)	248
32:	Picnicking on the power station (photograph: authors own)	251
33:	A theatrical funeral for EON (photograph: authors own)	252
34:	Having a game of ‘Giants, Wizards, and Pixies’ on the motorway (photograph: authors own)	253
35:	The glow-in-the-dark police barricade (photograph: authors own)	256

## Statement of Copyright

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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I am grateful to all the activists (including those who don't consider themselves 'activists') who I have encountered along the way, who gave up their time to speak to me, who opened their homes and lives to me, cooked me dinner and made me cups of tea, every conversation and every moment has contributed to the journey of this research. Equally, I am grateful to my extremely patient supervisors Dr Ben Anderson and Professor Louise Amoore for their academic insight, energy, and brilliance. Additionally, to Dr Gareth Hoskins and Professor Deborah Dixon for inspiring and enabling me to try to do what was previous unimaginable. Thanks also go to my family and friends for their support and to the ESRC 3 + 1 PhD studentship which funded this research.

Dedicated to Reginald Lee  
and Mike Russell

**Chapter 1**  
**Introduction:**  
**The Agency of Activism**

**The Carnival of Climate Chaos**

“BP! Esso! Shell! We don’t want your climate hell!” shouts an eight foot wolf with a megaphone, or rather a man on stilts wearing a wolf’s head (made out of papier-mâché), his hypnotic chant quickly spreading through the crowd. The wolf-man is an uneasy sight as he stalks the sides of the crowd on his rickety legs, it was all part of the madness of the ‘Carnival of Climate Chaos’, a student activist section of a larger national climate change march in London 2006. We had turned ourselves into a moving art installation: every few rows was fronted with blue fabric representing potential flooding, in the middle of the crowd this was replaced with yellow fabric and cactuses to represent a desert and was home to the samba band. The crowd was interspersed with huge weather symbols, representing ‘climate chaos’, floating above our heads on blue fabric, as well as smaller placard style symbols on wooden sticks. The smaller symbols had been made by individual groups and we had made a couple of our own and carried them along with us on the train. At Birmingham we had bumped into one of my professors who could tell from our placards where we were headed, he was glad that there were still some student activists left and I was pleased that he thought of us as activists, especially as this was my first experience of ‘real’ activism. There was an almost tangible sense of anticipation in the air, boosted every so often by the sounds of the samba band and the random bursts of chanting which seemed to emerge from nowhere. This feeling gradually faded the longer we stood waiting, despite the continued random bursts of noise, gradually replaced by boredom and tiredness. Minutes seemed to pass like hours, and it felt as if the protest would never start, that we would just go on waiting indefinitely...



Figure 1: Waiting for the march to begin (photograph: Nick Chan)

### **Unravelling the Carnival of Climate Chaos**

The brief example above can be considered part of the beginning of this research. It was around this time that a shift began in my own thinking from considering activism as a purely personal practice to the practice of activism as an object of academic inquiry in itself. That is not to say that the above was a singular catalyst for this research, this is a ‘habit’ of thinking (Bennett, 2010) which we often find ourselves falling into: trying to pinpoint the singular ‘cause’ of an act or event. This conception of causality is, as Hannah Arendt argues below, “an altogether alien and falsifying category” for understanding political phenomenon:

Causality, i.e., the factor of determination of a process of events in which always one event causes and can be explained by another, is probably an altogether alien and falsifying category in the realm of the historical and political sciences. Elements by themselves probably never cause anything. They become origins of events if and when they crystallize into fixed and definite forms. Then, and only then, can we trace their history

backwards. The event illuminates its own past, but it can never be deduced from it.

(Arendt, 1953, cited in Bennett, 2010: 33-34)

Equally, to propose the above experience as part of the beginning of this research is not to say that I was aware at the time that it would contribute to the journey of this research. Such beginnings can only be realised retrospectively, as Arendt writes above we can often only “trace” an event’s “history backwards”. In tracing such a history we illuminate multiple actors and acts rather than a singular cause. However, this default singular conception of causality, which Arendt above highlights, still plays out in our conception of many phenomena, including activism. This is evident in the activism literature, both within and beyond the discipline, where the act of activism is generally understood as a singular act enacted by a singular actor, and driven by a singular force or energy. It is therefore this view of activist agency which I wish to explore and counter through this research.

Arendt, as Bennett writes, distinguishes between “cause” and “origin”:  
“A cause is a singular, stable, and masterful initiator of effects, while an origin is a complex, mobile, and heteronomous enjoiner of forces” (Bennett, 2010: 33).  
The “enjoiner” of forces in the case of this research was ‘energy’. Energy, as an everyday word, idea, metaphor, and concept, referring to a thing or force behind action, seemed to emerge from both the field and the literature with increasing frequency. Before I knew it I was tripping over energy, finding it in the most unlikely and unexpected places, including in Lefebvre, who writes of energy, space and time as the three concepts through which the “cosmos” can be “summed up”:

Our knowledge of the material world is based on concepts defined in terms of the broadest generality and the greatest scientific (i.e. having a content) abstraction. Even if the links between these concepts and the physical realities to which they respond are not always clearly established, we do know that such links exist, and that the concepts or theories they imply – energy, space, time – can be neither conflated nor separated from one another...The ‘substance’ (to use the old vocabulary of philosophy) of

this cosmos or 'world', to which humanity with its consciousness belongs, has properties that can be adequately summed up by means of the three terms mentioned above...Although in one sense this 'substance' is hard to conceive of, most of all at a cosmic level, it is also true to say that evidence of its existence stares us in the face: our senses and our thoughts apprehend nothing else.

(Lefebvre, 1991: 12)

As Lefebvre suggests, the frequency of my 'energy' encounters are not merely random and abstract, energy is used for a reason and often because it helps us to articulate something of the 'substance' and experience of our everyday worlds. Following these frequent encounters I therefore decided that 'energy' would form the focus of my exploration of activism. Of course, early on I began to follow energy, but equally it seemed to be following me, as energy was arguably always present, but simply not under that exact name. From quite early on I wanted to somehow locate or pinpoint the force behind activism. In my own experiences some activists seemed to possess an infinite and inexhaustible energy for activism, I wanted to get at the driver and source of activism. It seemed important for both the continuation of activism and the beginning of activism in others to find this source, it appeared as though something needed to be switched on or tapped in to in order to activate non-activists into activism. Ultimately I was interested in the agency of activism, an agency which I imagined at first to be straightforward. The beginning example was therefore chosen not simply because it formed part of the beginnings of this research, but additionally because it demonstrates particular assumptions around the agency of activism and offers alternative ways to conceive of this agency. I will therefore begin this exploration of the 'agency of activism' through the lens of the 'Carnival of Climate Chaos'. Agency here is "understood as both the production of action and of what counts as action (and of actors and of what counts as actors)" (Thrift, 1996: 2). Therefore this exploration will involve unravelling three aspects of the example: the act of activism, the actors of activism, and the production of activism, and finally offering a particular conception of the term 'energy' through which to better understand the practice of activism. Energy, though in itself ingrained with numerous assumptions, has the potential, if used

in a particular way, to enable a rethinking of each of these aspects of activist agency.

### **The Act of Activism**

My experience of the Carnival of Climate Chaos demonstrates, in retrospect, certain assumptions I held around the act of activism, assumptions which are mirrored more broadly in academic and cultural perspectives of activism, including within activism itself. In particular, these assumptions are captured by my frustration at waiting for the ‘real’ activism to begin and waiting to become a ‘real’ activist, the second part I shall discuss in the section to follow. Firstly, the act of waiting for the ‘real’ activism encapsulates particular hierarchies of action within broader conceptions of activism, namely that particular forms of activism are considered to be more worthy of the label ‘activism’. Those acts considered ‘real’ activism are generally those that involve the most people and/or the most dramatic acts (e.g. protest marches and demonstrations, occupations and sit-ins, street theatre and spectacular symbolic acts). This leads to a dominance in the academic activism literature on these overt spectacular acts, examples within the geographical literature include climate activists blockading roads (Chatterton, 2006), the theatrical direct action of the Clown Army (Routledge, 2004), and environmental protest camps (Anderson, 2004a).

Additionally, there are hierarchies of action within seemingly singular acts of activism such as a protest march. While a march is often considered a singular act it is composed of numerous ‘micro’ acts (e.g., chanting, and holding props and banners). Note that their naming as ‘micro’ acts is not to imply that they are micro in their impact and importance, but rather this is an assumption made about them and that they are micro in the sense of being more subtle and easily overlooked. In the beginning example these micro acts not only contributed to the establishing of the march, but also such micro acts continued to be enacted once the march had ‘started’, rather than merging into a ‘single’ act. Such micro actions are considered less important and less productive of change, than the ‘main’ or overall and collective act (e.g. that of marching).

Less obvious and overt acts within activism are generally considered to *not* count as activism, or at most only to count to the extent that they contribute to the more ‘important’ acts. So, the moments in the beginning example are considered acts of preparing and waiting for the ‘real’ activism to begin, e.g. preparing props and tools, rehearsing chants, and waiting for the act of marching to begin. Despite the fact that this very preparation; the establishing of a carnival through costumes, props, chants and music, and our occupying of the street, was in itself creating an alternative moment, use, and atmosphere for the street. Here then activism was seen as the end point, the outcome of the preparation, rather than the process and constant emerging of alternatives and new potential. Therefore in this context I considered activism to be that which we were waiting for, and the process of waiting, creating a carnival, and occupying a space, to *not* be activism. Because I considered activism in this frame I became frustrated and bored the longer the waiting was prolonged. Instead of becoming frustrated I could have been appreciating the weird and wonderful sights around me, and the productive and transformative effect they could in themselves contribute. Therefore such constructions of activism play out in day-to-day life, rather than having merely theoretical implications.

The national climate change march which the Carnival of Climate Chaos formed a part of, was a central event in a campaign entitled ‘I count’ by the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition<sup>1</sup>. The ‘I count’ campaign was about very the power or potential of micro and individual action, yet ultimately in this campaign actions were only deemed *to count* in the context of a collective act, and a collective act involving enough individuals or enough micro acts. This reflects part of a broader contradictory rhetoric in climate change activism, in which small scale acts are deemed important and emphasised as part of the solution, while at the same time are positioned as meaningless and ineffective in the context of the global ‘fight’ against climate chaos. This contradiction easily breeds apathy especially when others (e.g. the ‘general public’, ‘non-activists’, and the populations of other countries) are viewed cynically, and this apathy was frequently encountered in my own activism, along the lines of “what’s the point when china are building power stations everyday”. There are particular scalar

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<sup>1</sup> A collective of organisations including campaigning groups, charities etc.

assumptions present in this dividing of action, namely that small scale acts cannot make a difference to the enormous and every expanding scale which is climate change. The making of a difference is always in this case about making a difference towards stopping climate change (or the worst form of it), and to the apocalyptic future posed by climate change, a seemingly impossibly huge task. Ultimately small scale acts are deemed to only make a difference to climate change as a whole when they are enacted on a mass scale. Whereas acts which start as a large scale or mass action are automatically assumed to be able to have a larger scale impact, and if they do not immediately have such an intended outcome they are deemed failures. Yet it is possible for mass demonstration as a whole to have little intended effect (e.g. in effecting the actions of politicians), while a small scale act within this may have greater 'effect', as Latour writes: "A giant in a story is not a bigger character than a dwarf, it just does different things." (Latour, 1988, 30 cited in Bingham and Thrift, 2000: 286). For example, from my own perspective what has the most lasting impact about the Carnival of Climate Chaos was not the actual march itself, or the mass gathering in Trafalgar Square with which it ended, but the beginning elements such as: the wolf-man on his stilts, the samba band's sporadic and energetic performances, and the tangible excitement and anticipation in the air. While the intention in these moments was never (I assume) to inspire an academic interest in activism, this is what they contributed to. Unintended outcomes can of course occur but the important point is that such unexpected outcomes are not necessarily lesser or worse than the intended, they are just 'different'.

However, it should be noted that the 'I count' campaign did achieve its main intended outcome, the Climate Bill, which this march no doubt contributed to. But arguably this intended outcome of the Climate Bill has had little quantifiable effect, therefore intended outcomes do not always set on course a desired course of action and can become to an extent false victories. Although both the bill and march have arguably contributed to the normalising of climate change in the political and everyday spheres. Therefore equally outcomes can

occur which are to an extent<sup>2</sup> in line with the original but quite unplanned and unexpected. Yet these unexpected and unplanned victories are rarely celebrated.

Within both these hierarchies of action, in which direct and macro acts reside at the top, the act of activism emerges as an intentional and overt human act. Equally, both these hierarchies position the act of activism as a fixed endpoint or outcome rather a more processional conception of action such as that proposed in non-representational theory (Thrift, 1996, 2008). In other words, as academics exploring activism we are still trapped in a rather human-centred and representational conception of the act of activism, where we imagine activism to be an act enacted solely by a human agent and an act which can be accurately captured and represented. Yet from the above, and other experiences, I realised that the act of activism *is* a ‘more-than-representational’ (Lorimer, 2005) practice: a doing, a process, and a constant becoming. In the dominant activism literature activism is often portrayed as a fixed endpoint, there is little attempt to bring non-representational theory in conversation with the practice of activism. Where activism is discussed within the non-representational literature itself it is generally in a very detached theoretical way (e.g. Thrift, 2008) without exploring it on the ground (literally and figuratively) through particular case studies and examples, and more importantly there is an absence of first hand experience. This is an absence which this research seeks to fill by exploring and experiencing activism first-hand while at the same time approaching it from a non-representational theoretical perspective. In this research therefore I will demonstrate the more-than-representational (Lorimer, 2005) nature of activism, and the act of activism as a process in itself rather than a ‘thing’ which ‘has processes’ (Summers-Effler, 2010).

Similar scalar assumptions, as outlined above, are made in relation to the actors of activism, as I shall discuss in the next section, with the human activist at the top as both the enactor of activism and as capable of the most effect. Whereas other elements, such as the spaces and ‘props’ of activism, are

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<sup>2</sup> Arguably the normalising of climate change is not a completely positive development, as observed by Rose (2012) at a recent workshop on resilience at Durham University the normalising of climate change has to an extent reduced it’s pressing and urgent nature, to the extent that it at times it becomes simply another factor through which to make everyday decisions and can easily be dismissed in favour of the “convenience of modernity” (*ibid*).

considered to only contribute to such acts through helping or hindering the main and central actor (the intentional human activist).

### **The Actors of Activism**

In waiting to become a ‘real’ activist, by participating in the ‘direct’ action event of a protest march, I was privileging the identity of ‘activist’ as well as assuming that an activist must enact certain acts namely so called ‘direct’ action. In addition to their spectacular and overt nature ‘direct actions’ tend to be considered confrontational and oppositional acts, and as such acts are privileged activism becomes seen as an act of ‘direct’ confrontation or opposition. This is reflected in the activism literature where the overwhelming terminology is one of resistance, struggles, and fights against or for something. This language is often drawn from and mirrored in activism itself, thus producing a vicious circle of meaning. While contemporary activism often contains confrontational or oppositional elements it is increasingly, I would argue, becoming more about producing and living alternatives in the here and now, as Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) attest: “we found that everyday [activist] practices are used as building blocks to construct a hoped-for future in the present.” (*ibid*: 476). This was especially evident in my chosen case studies, as it is in Chatterton and Pickerill’s, though it should be noted that in both cases the focus has been on UK examples and thus activism of the West/Global North/Developed world.

Additionally, as Chatterton and Pickerill note, such understandings of activism as resistance and oppositional in turn produce an exclusionary identity of ‘activist’: “participants express identities that attempt to go beyond exclusionary labels such as ‘militant’ or ‘activist’, which are set apart from the everyday and simply oppose the present condition.” (*ibid*). The point then is that many activists recognise, and academics too are beginning to recognise, that the dominant conception of the ‘activist’ has become an exclusionary and disempowering one for the many non-activists, not-quite activists, and potential activists. Part of the exclusionary element of the ‘activist’ is what an activist does or is supposed to do to qualify for the label ‘activist’, for example in my own research I encountered activists who felt they were not radical or active enough to don the identity of ‘activist’. Language of course matters, and in particular the

associations, meanings, and assumptions we attach to and build up around particular words effect how we experience the world in practice.

Such hierarchies of actors within activism are only part of the problem, perhaps more importantly the actor in activism is nearly always assumed to be the human actor, as well as the human actor who identifies and ‘deserves’ to identify themselves as an ‘activist’. This experience of the Carnival, again in retrospect, for me highlights the multiple things and thus actors which contribute to an act of activism. For example, the carnival appearance and atmosphere of the protest was only made possible through the various ‘things’ present: the instruments of the samba band, the flooding/desert sheets, the weather symbol banners and placards, and the colourful dress and costume of the protestors. These various things are more than just tools or props of activism, as Thrift writes, drawing on Latour, “things” or objects are more-than passive “mute” props:

Too often, ‘things are unfairly accused of being just “things” (Latour, 2000: 117). But objects are brought into the world as more than mute props to which humans react – or alternatively as overpowering assemblages sucking the life out of humanity. Instead, they are given their own modes of existence and modes of thought.

(Thrift, 2004b: 86)

Things then can take on a life of their own, our assumption of their passivity is a ‘habit’ of thinking (Bennett, 2010) similar to the singular causality outlined at the beginning by Arendt. Yet, as Latour demonstrates, the very language we use to describe the role of things designates these roles as ‘actions’: “After all, there is hardly any doubt that kettles ‘boil’ water, knives ‘cut’ meat, baskets ‘hold’ provisions...Are those verbs not designating actions?” (Latour, 2005: 71). If we look at the history of activism it is littered and cluttered with ‘things’: placards, banners, and chains, and more recently costumes, masks, and music, but such props have arguably always been seen as part of the scenery with the ‘heroic’ human activist foregrounded. While the agency of the human actor has been questioned more broadly, including in the work of Latour among others, there seems to be a lack of, and perhaps a fear of, questioning activist agency in

the same way. As if to do so would somehow be an act of opposition to the activist and their cause. This is not the intention, just as Latour's ANT does not argue that "objects do things 'instead' of human actors" but rather that things do things as well, therefore that things are involved in and 'participate' in the act of activism *as well*:

these implements, according to our definition, are actors, or more precisely, *participants* in the course of action waiting to be given a figuration...ANT is not the empty claim that objects do things 'instead' of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored (Latour, 2005: 71-2, emphasis original)

Therefore to argue that things participate as well is not to devalue the agency of activists, but rather to begin to value or revalue the role that other elements play in the act of activism. The overall task in this research is still the same as with previous more obviously activist 'friendly' research: to better understand activism. And, in order to "thoroughly explore" activism, as Latour suggests, 'things' and the non-human or more-than human elements should not be overlooked, as 'things' are after all part of the *conditions for action*. If seemingly minor actors contribute to the conditions for action then so do apparently micro acts discussed in the previous section. The conditions for particular forms of action involve multiple elements becoming favourably aligned e.g. in the case of The Carnival this might include colourful banners/placards, clear weather, and enthusiastic activists, among other elements, but this alignment does not guarantee that such action will occur. The conditions for a particular action can be present, can be aligned, but this does not guarantee action will occur, they merely create the potential for action. Latour argues that a thing is an actor or actant, though he prefers the term 'participant', if it "makes a difference" in some way: "then any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor—or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant...Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent's action or not?" (Latour, 2005: 71). Additionally I would argue that something is an actor if it has the *potential* to "make a difference" to a particular "state of affairs". The conditions

of action, of which the non-human along with humans actors form part of, represents the potential for action rather than merely some ‘thing’ which proceeds action. If the potential for action is understood in this collective way, through the conditions for action, it is not that particular actors or acts are more important as they all contribute to something more, something more-than the sum of its parts (Bennett, 2010). So even if a seemingly insignificant element is removed from this equation it can dramatically change the overall conditions present.

### **The Production of Activism**

When activism is considered a human act naturally human ‘energy’ is considered as that which produces or drives it, and like the act and actor of activism itself energy is generally assumed to be a ‘singular’ force. Often this energy is considered to be manifest in or equivalent to passions and emotions. This is especially apparent in an emerging and expanding literature which draws attention to a previously overlooked aspect of activism: the emotions and affects of activism. In the majority of this literature affects and emotions are understood as the principle driver of activism. This turn to emotions and affects in activism research replaces previous cold rational understandings of activism, as Jasper (1998) writes in a pivotal paper in the emergence of this subfield of activism literature. At the time of Jasper’s paper, even with the emergence of “culturally oriented research”, activists were still viewed as purely “rational” agents:

Emotions have disappeared from models of protest. When crowds and collective behaviour, not social movements and collective action, were the lens for studying protest, emotions were central. Frustration, anger, alienation, and anomie were not merely an incidental characteristic but *the motivation and explanation of protest*. Such images were displaced 30 years ago by metaphors of rational economic calculations and purposive formal organisations for whom social movements were just one more means of pursuing desired ends. In the last 10 years, these instrumental metaphors have themselves been challenged from a cultural perspective in which protestors have a variety of reasons for pursuing a range of

goals, not all of them material advantages for individuals or groups...In this wave of culturally oriented research, considerable respect has still been paid to the rationality of protestor.

(Jasper, 1998: 397-8, my emphasis)

The implicit assumption within this cultural analysis of activism was, as Jasper notes, that emotions are “irrational”: “A variety of key cultural concepts – identity, injustice frames, cognitive liberation, and others – have been treated as though they were entirely cognitive...If protestors are emotional, does that make them irrational? Recent researchers seem to fear – wrongly – that it does.” (Jasper, 1998: 398). This is generally not the case within the more current emotionally orientated activism research, this has been replaced I would argue with another implicit assumption. The new assumption being that emotions or affects can be considered simplistic causes and drivers of the act of activism, rather than as I would argue indicators of the presence (or absence) of the conditions for such action. This phrase, ‘the conditions for action’, is inspired by Ahmed’s (2010b) observation that a road, rather than being merely passive in the act of walking across it, provides the very “conditions” for such acts: “that which has been deemed passive, as just doing nothing, is doing something and even provides the conditions of *possibility* for doing something.” (209, emphasis original). Therefore this is what I shall refer to through the use of the term ‘energy’: the conditions of and potential for action, conditions which are composed of multiple elements as opposed to a singular force. This potential for action is not just the potential for a particular form of action, designated or labelled as an act of activism. Rather this potential refers to the potential for action which can be transformative, and which can contribute to the activist project, even if in a small or unexpected and unintended way.

The Carnival of Climate Chaos, among other activist experiences, illuminated the act of activism as an affective experience and practice. In line with the emerging and expanding literature on the emotions and affects of activism, I imagined activism to be ‘produced’ primarily by emotions and affects, in a rather simplistic cause and effect model. However if we define affect as an: “increase or decrease in the ability of the body and mind alike to act” (Thrift, 2004a: 62) or as a “power of acting” and a “power of being acted upon”

(Deleuze, 1988: 27), then affect is ultimately about the *potential* for action, as an increased ‘ability’ or ‘power’ to act does not necessarily mean that action will take place. Rather than literally producing action then affects signal the varying presence of and openness to the conditions for action. These conditions might include: the presence of relevant actors (which includes more-than-human actors), the potential of such actors to act, the potential for such actors to align, an openness to action and relevant actors, favourable spatial conditions, potential forms for action to take, and such conditions can come together or align to form the potential for action. This idea of alignment draws on the affective literatures with which this research began by exploring, including Brennan’s (2004) theories on the role of nervous and hormonal systems alignment in the “transmission” of affect, and Deleuze’s (1988) “compositions” and “decompositions” resulting from encounters between bodies. Similarly, the idea of openness draws on the affect literature in which affect is often defined in relation to Deleuze’s (1988) reading of Spinoza as a “power of acting” and “power of being acted upon” (27), the former suggests an increase or decrease in an openness to acting (rather than a guarantee of action), while the latter suggests an increase or decrease in openness to being acted upon, therefore I would argue openness is key in affect. So, rather than action being literally and linearly produced, the potential for action is a process of aligned and openness to action, and therefore always pivots on the *relations* between elements rather than the properties of a single element or actor. The potential and conditions of action result from the alignment of various actors and ‘acts’, which in turn are influenced by the openness of such acts and actors to enter into this alignment and disposition. This is what I aim to show in my empirical research, that action occurs and is made possible through these processes rather than through straightforward causes and uniform effects. It is therefore these processes, and some of the conditions for action in the particular contexts of my case studies, which I aim to illuminate.

### **The Energies of Activism**

As Arendt states in the beginning of this chapter: “elements by themselves probably never cause anything” (Arendt, 1953, cited in Bennett,

2010: 33), yet within academic discussions the practice of activism is often assigned a singular cause, whether a particular political belief or an emotion the intention is to locate the singular ‘thing’ driving activism. Additionally, whether activism is viewed in cold calculated terms, as Jasper argues it was previously, or as driven by feelings and passions, as in the case of recent literature, it is in both cases human agency which is paramount. However, as Bennett notes human agency is still somewhat of a “mystery”:

No one really knows what human agency is, or what humans are doing when they are said to perform as agents. In the face of every analysis, human agency remains something of a mystery. If we do not know just how it is that human agency operates, how can we be so sure that the processes through which nonhumans *make their mark* are qualitatively different?

(Bennett, 2010: 34, my emphasis)

If human agency is still somewhat of a mystery then so too is the agency of human activists, and as Bennett suggests how can we then be sure that the agency of nonhumans within activism is so very different and removed from ‘human’ acts. We too quickly assume that we know how the agency of the human activist operates, and too quickly assume that this agency is separate and independent from the nonhuman in activist spaces.

The practice of activism is ultimately about “making a difference”, whether in terms of making a difference to a specific campaign or issue, towards a desired change or hoped for future, or towards averting something such as an unjust course of action or an apocalyptic future. Each type of actions is ultimately about change, the differences being the kind and scale of change called for. But such acts are also about causality in terms of what causes or effects it is assumed such acts can have, namely that ‘human’ acts or those considered to be enacted solely by humans, and dramatic acts, are considered to have greater potential of effect. As I aim to show in the coming chapters, although this has been sidelined and overlooked in the literature, the nonhuman can “make their mark” on the act of activism and on spaces of activism. And such mark making is not merely in terms of contributing to a ‘human’ activist’s

act, but furthermore, to the overall activist project. To me the activist project is about creating the *potential* for transformative action (no matter how seemingly small and ‘insignificant’), and a restlessness with and questioning of the status quo. It is, I would argue, the nurturing and encouraging of this potential for transformative action which is more important than the outcome and actualisation of individual acts of activism themselves.

This making of a difference in an activist context is often considered, by both academics and activists alike, in quite limited terms, namely in the “fixed definite forms” to which Arendt refers to in relation to causality more broadly. If no immediate tangible result is produced by an act of activism then often such an act is deemed to have failed. Yet what is more important, I would argue, in the practice of activism, is creating and encouraging the *conditions for action*, rather than whether the desired change is necessary achieved in the immediate moment. Considering the “disposition of things” (Jullien, 1995) and the role that things can play in the activist project can, I would argue, lead to more productive activist action. This is more-than simply an optimistic mantra in which all failures provide lessons to be learnt, but rather that apparent failures are not failures in terms of activist energies. Often the concern within activism or those studying activism is success rather than failure, actualisation rather than potentiality. When perhaps the real focus and concern should be on activating or aligning the conditions for action, by creating an openness to action. So called failures of activism encountered in the course of this research were never truly failures but simply the redirecting of energies or potential. For example, during my participation in one activist group the preparation towards an event which did not actually occur or actualise led to new activist connections and alliances being formed, which in turn led to other unexpected forms of action.

### **Structure of thesis**

In this introductory chapter I have tried to highlight the assumptions present in both academic and activist rhetoric around what the act of activism is, who enacts it, and how it is produced. By recognising the assumptions present in current thinking around the agency of activism there is an opportunity to re-think this agency in light of non-representational, affectual, and more-than-human

theories (Lorimer, 2005; Thrift, 2004a, 2008; Deleuze, 1988; Ahmed, 2010; Bennett, 2004, 2010; Latour, 2005). A non-representational lens allows us to see the act of activism not as a fixed outcome or endpoint, which suggests that there is a process of production which ends once the act is produced or actualised, but rather the act of activism in itself as a dynamic doing, process and becoming. Considering the act of activism in this way, allows us to see the production of action not as something separate from the act but rather something which the act of activism is always tangled up in and separable from, just as Lefebvre (1991) suggests of energy, space, and time at the beginning of this chapter: “energy, space, time – can be neither conflated nor separated from one another” (12). An affective lens allows us to see the act of activism as enabled by the conditions for action, and the relations to and between these conditions, and to see affects as signalling the presence (or absence) of and openness to these conditions, rather than action simply being produced by affects. While a more-than-human lens allows us to see the multiple actors and acts which form the conditions and potential for further action, and that the act of activism is not simply enacted by a sole human actor but instead always involves multiple participants. The task here in this research is ultimately about bringing recent theorising around action into conversation with the act of activism.

This introductory chapter has, I hope, made clear the focus of this thesis, however, it is important to now explicitly state and summarise the aims and objectives of this research, before I summarise the structure of the thesis itself. The overall objective of this research is to contribute to the furthering of understanding of activism by rethinking the agency of activism, to address this objective, this research has three aims:

- 1) To develop understanding of *what counts as an act* in activism by exploring a variety of different forms of climate change activism through a more-than-representational lens.
- 2) To expand understanding of *who counts as an actor* in activism by exploring the role of the more-than-human in activism spaces and practices.

- 3) To contribute to understanding of *how the act of activism is produced* by exploring the relation between emotions and affects and the act of activism and developing a particular conception of ‘energy’.

The first aim involves offering a more-than-representational perspective of what counts as an act of activism, that is, activism as a more-than-representational doing rather than a representable endpoint. By exploring a variety of acts of activism the hope is to contribute to a rethinking of the scales of acts themselves and the scales of impact such acts can have, namely illuminating the subtler more ‘micro’ acts of activism and that such acts do not only have ‘micro’ effects. Additionally, this aim is about decentring the current dominance of direct action, within activism literature and wider understandings of activism, by exploring a variety of different activist practices, including more mundane and everyday acts.

The second aim involves offering a more-than-human perspective of who counts as an actor in activism, that is, recognising the role of the more-than-human in activism and that the actors in activism are not only the human activists. As stated previously, this is not about exploring whether things do things *instead* and therefore undermining the agency of the human activist, but rather exploring the ways in which things are actors *as well* in activism. Activism, including the activism explored here, is cluttered with things and yet the activism literature overlooks the more-than-human role in activism, this aim is therefore about countering this absence.

The third aim involves offering an affective perspective of how the act of activism is produced, namely that it is not straightforwardly ‘produced’ by tangible quantifiable forces, but rather involves processes of alignment and openness to the conditions for action. This aim seeks to contribute to the emerging literature which questions the assumption that feelings are straightforward catalysts for activism (Horton and Kraftl, 2009), by arguing that emotions and affects are instead one element of the conditions for action, and that they signals the presence of (or absence of) such conditions and the relation of the subject to the wider conditions for action present.

Much like the aims above, the thesis to follow will be structured in three parts: theoretical, methodological, and empirical. The first part, which will

directly follow this chapter, will theoretically set the scene for the research, offering a more in-depth exploration of the assumptions around action (Chapter 2: The Act of Activism) and energy (Chapter 3: The Energies of Activism) in relation to activism. Chapter 2 will begin with a critical review of the geographical activist and resistance literature, drawing out in particular the conception of capacity, both the capacity to act and the capacity to initiate action in others (mobilisation). Chapter 3 will begin with another critical literature review, in this case of the emerging geographical literature on the emotions and affects of activism, and incorporate particular ‘energetic’<sup>3</sup> literature, alongside the affect, non-representational and more-than-human literatures introduced here, into a re-reading of the agency of activism.

The methodological section of the thesis, Chapter 4, will outline both the choice of case studies, the methodology through which I approached the fieldwork, and the choice of presentation style for the ‘data’ gathered. In addition to contributing to an interest in activism from an academic perspective, the Carnival of Climate Chaos contributed to a particular interest in climate change activism and therefore this shall be the focus in terms of case study examples. To counter the reproduced assumptions around the practice of activism I chose to explore different forms of activism beyond and in addition to the typical ‘direct’ action forms explored, in order to avoid reproducing direct action as separate from more everyday forms of activism. Firstly, I therefore chose to explore a ‘direct’ action form of activism through the protest camps of Camp for Climate Action. Secondly, activism as a more regular part of everyday life through a local Transition Town group, where climate change is scaled down to a local issue, and towns/cities/villages can transition to a more ecological and economically ‘resilient’ state. Thirdly, and finally, activism as an overt<sup>4</sup> lifestyle in itself through the example of the low-impact living and building practices of the Lammas eco-village in Wales.

The structure of the three empirical chapters will be similar to the structure used here in the introduction and the structure of the research aims (the act, actors, and production of action). But additionally I will be drawing out

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<sup>3</sup> By energetic literature I mean both that which is explicitly concerned with energy and key literatures which have enabled me to rethink energy (Bennett, 2010; Brown, 1999; Collins, 1990, 2004; Jullien, 1995; Stern, 1985; Summers-Effler, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> As arguably activism can often be considered a lifestyle in itself.

particular themes or patterns which emerged in the fieldwork that seemed to play a significant role in the conditions for action in the context of these examples: the ordering or arranging of space, re-imagining and re-making the future, and play and playfulness. The future, while significant to all activism, plays a particularly important role in climate change activism, and therefore partly emerged as a cross-cutting theme for this reason. Similarly playful forms and practices have become increasingly common place in activism, of which the Carnival of Climate Chaos is one such example, and there is an ever expanding literature concerned with these playful and joyful forms of activism (e.g. Klein, 2002, Branagan, 2007; Chvasta, 2006; Routledge, 2004; Wettergren, 2009). But the arrangement of space is often sidelined and seen as secondary to the ‘where’ or place of activism, yet arrangement emerged as an important element in this research and particular arrangements reoccurred across the examples. Additionally, energetic assumptions emerged across all three themes: it is often assumed that particular arrangements can encourage and contain the potential (or impotential) for action, while the future, or more specifically re-imagining the future, is assumed to be able to re-energise the present, finally forms of play whether used as a practice of activism or as a bonding tool within activism are often assumed to be able to energise participants.

Although this is an aim across the three empirical chapters the first empirical chapter, Chapter 5, entitled ‘Spaces of Activism’ will be particularly concerned with highlighting the multiple actors or participants involved in the act of activism. Alongside drawing attention to subtler acts of activism, and demonstrating that the conditions for action are not straightforwardly produced but rather aligned and opened up (or closed off). This chapter will focus in on a particular space, the space of the Climate Camp 2009, in order to: allow for a sufficient level of detail to be developed, to demonstrate some of the complexities and ‘micro’ acts and actors present within just one site of this research, and additionally in order to attempt to immerse the reader in the field site rather than dipping them into three very different sites of activism to begin with. However similarities and parallels between the examples will be drawn out in this chapter, it is therefore not that this space is more important or that direct action sites are more important or more interesting, but simply that this is where

the fieldwork began and therefore where themes and ideas began from and returned to.

The empirical chapter which follows, Chapter 6, entitled ‘Doing Activism’, will focus in particular on the act of activism and drawing attention to acts beyond those typically considered activism and typically considered to contribute to the activist project. Here I will draw an example from each case study demonstrating the importance of practices of re-imaging and re-making the future to each case study, and their role in the conditions for action. In addition I will use these future practices to demonstrate the role of not-quite actualised acts and not-quite tangible presences in the conditions for action.

The final empirical chapter, Chapter 7, will be concerned with ‘Activist Relations’. Here activist relations refer to more-than-human relations by demonstrating the role of more-than-human elements in explicit and overt practices of human relation forging. I will explore practices of play within each of the examples, while within each example it is a very different form of play being practiced, the creation or strengthening of bonds is an implicit aim within each. It is assumed that the practice of play can energise and strengthen groups, but I will argue that instead of a literal cause and effect it is the process of alignment and misalignment which opens up and closes off the potential for such bonds. Although these will be processes which I will argue for throughout they are perhaps most noticeable in these final examples, and even in the so apparently fundamentally human practice of play the more-than-human quite literally comes into play. This final empirical chapter will then be followed by the thesis conclusion.

## Chapter 2

### The Act of Activism: Capacity and Mobilisation

Within geographical literature, the act of activism is often understood essentially as politics *in action* or *politics enacted*. The idea of action is therefore central, both to the very definition of the term activism itself (see Ruddick, 2004), and to academic understanding of activism. However the *act* of activism is rarely unpacked or analysed in depth within this literature, with attention often focused on the outcome of such actions rather than the act itself. The act of activism is thus generally considered as a planned and intentional act, the outcome of hours of organisation and planning to achieve (or ‘fail’ to achieve) a certain end or aim. From such a perspective acts are only relevant in terms of the ‘end game’ of activism, that is, the goals of such acts and whether such goals are achieved, rather than the process itself. This chapter aims to counter this forgetting of the *act* in *activism*, and demonstrate how remembering and unpacking this fundamental aspect can pave the way for a revaluing of energy as a potentially important concept for understanding activism. Energy makes it possible to see the act as significant not merely for the outcomes it creates and aims it achieves but rather to, and in the context of, the wider energies and processes of activism itself. The critical attention given to activism within the discipline has taken a very particular form, as I shall discuss, meaning that the act of activism has become ingrained with particular assumptions which are in turn continuously reproduced. In order to explore the *act* of activism it is important to unpack these assumptions, which relate to the types of action considered acts of activism and the types of actors considered to count as actors in activism, namely that particular acts and actors are deemed passive and irrelevant in the practice of activism.

The first assumption, around what acts count as activism, refers to the way in which overt, spectacular and intentional acts of activism are privileged e.g. the protest, the march, the occupation, ultimately ‘direct’ forms of activist action. This leads to activism being primarily conceived of as an oppositional and confrontational act. Which in turn is ingrained with particular assumptions around power, namely that activists are *powerless* and seek to *confront* ‘power’

in some guise. Such an understanding is especially the case when activism is framed as ‘resistance’, as it so often is, as such terminology implies a struggle or fight against and in opposition; resisting something or someone. The preferred terminology here is therefore activism<sup>1</sup>, as it is more encompassing and inclusive of a wider array of actions towards change, and does not limit the understanding of overtly oppositional acts in merely these terms. As when activism is interpreted as simply an oppositional act this leads to an over emphasis on the oppositional nature of the action itself. Yet, even overtly oppositional actions involve *more-than* simply confrontational and oppositional ideas, aims, and feelings.

One of the overarching aims of this research is to move away from the construction of activism as simply a political act, and instead consider the more-than-political nature of activism. Activism can clearly be a political act, both if one considers politics in a conventional sense of relating to government and state, but equally if one considers the political more broadly as the presence of power relations within the everyday<sup>2</sup>. While the purpose here is not dispute this assertion, that power relations are important and indeed saturate the everyday, but such an assertion can often lead to the marginalising of everything else: the more-than-political. With this phrase I refer both to the way in which the political (defined in the broad sense of power relations) cannot be separated from the everyday, yet at the same time there is much more to such everyday acts<sup>3</sup>. The political is often only a minor part, even of what one might consider an overt political act.

The ‘more-than’ phrasing here is borrowed from Lorimer (2005) who prefers to refer to ‘more-than’, as opposed to non-representational, as the ‘non’ implies a separation from representation and an almost anti-representational stance:

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<sup>1</sup> Though activists and academics alike are beginning to question the use of the word activism as it can be exclusionary and implies an ideal which is difficult to live up to, equally it creates a division between morally superior ‘activists’ and morally inferior ‘non-activists’ (see Chatterton, 2006, and Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). So the word is not without its problems but it can have positive potential if used more broadly and less exclusively.

<sup>2</sup> The everyday is used here to refer to day-to-day life and the mundane.

<sup>3</sup> Which is after all what the majority of activists acts are; everyday acts which are part of our everyday life worlds.

I prefer to think of ‘more-than-representational’ geography, the teleology of the original ‘non-’ title having proven an unfortunate hindrance. It is reasonable to expect an explanation of what that ‘more than’ might include. To summarize lots of complex statements as simply as possible, it is multifarious, open encounters in the realm of practice that matter most. (*ibid*: 84)

Additionally Lorimer’s ‘more-than’ more accurately captures the non-representational message, namely that our worlds are more-than that which can be represented, and that we should seek to explore these “excessive and transient aspects of living” (*ibid*: 83). Similarly, the argument here is that activism can not be summed up in the phrase ‘political’, even when the political is considered a part of the everyday and every act, but equally I am not arguing that activism is not or non- political. By encompassing it in the ‘political’, i.e. considering activism a ‘political’ act which ‘produces’ and is ‘produced’ by ‘political’ feelings, we overlook so much of the act of activism. This view of the act of activism as simply a ‘political act’ sits within the understandings outlined by Jasper (1998) in the introductory chapter (Section: The Production of Action) in which activism is portrayed as a cold rational act carried out by a cold rational agent, enacted to achieve particular ends. As though to conceive of activism in any other way would be to label it an irrational act and activists as irrational.

Although the political is important, it should not be considered central at the cost of overlooking other aspects, especially in relation to acts considered overtly political acts i.e. activism. This is the task of much literature in the emerging field of activism emotions and affects which seeks to de-centralise the political and de-marginalise the emotional and affective aspects of activism. As Goodwin *et al* wrote on the cusp of the emergence of this field of study, following in the footsteps of Jasper (1998)<sup>4</sup>, emotional aspects of activism have led a ‘shadow existence’:

Once at the centre of the study of politics, emotions have led a shadow existence for the last three decades, with no place in the rationalistic,

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<sup>4</sup> “Emotions pervade all social life, social movements included” (Jasper, 1998: 398),

structural, and organizational models that dominate academic political analysis...as though political participants were computers mechanically processing symbols. Somehow, academic observers have managed to ignore the swirl of passions around them in political life.

(Goodwin *et al*, 2001: 1)

Furthermore, the view of activism as simply a political act has become naturalised, like Goodwin *et al*, Muller (1997) writes viewing the act of activism as a political act has not always been the case: “Resistance, or what one usually calls resistance, was in the beginning not a political gesture, but a *moral* gesture: an instinctive separation from the tiring ticking of norm” (91-2, emphasis original, cited in Bleiker, 2000: 187). As a ‘moral gesture’ the act of resistance was an intuitive and instinctive act rather than a planned and rational act. This switch from considering activism a moral act to considering it a political act, to an extent, de-emotionalises the act of activism; viewing it as a cold and rational act for fear of irrationalising the activists (Jasper, 1998). This literature asserts therefore that the mobilising potential of other aspects, such as morals and emotions, has become sidelined and overlooked. So while literature on the emotions of activism has started this task of de-centring the political and introducing other facets to the act of activism, I wish to propose a further element: energy and therefore the energies of activism. While energy is often considered a dimension of emotion and affect, drawing on the work of Stern (1985), I will argue that it is *more-than* this. On his similar term of ‘vitality affects’ Stern writes:

What do we mean by this, and why is it necessary to add a new term for certain forms of human experience? It is necessary because many qualities of feeling that occur do not fit into our existing lexicon or taxonomy of affects. These elusive qualities are better captured by dynamic, kinetic terms, such as “surging,” “fading away,” “fleeting,” “explosive,” “crescendo,” “decrescendo,” “bursting,” “drawn out,” and so on. (Stern, 1985: 54)

According to Stern energetic feelings can be feelings in themselves e.g. ‘surging’ and ‘fading’, felt and experienced in themselves rather than as dimensions of emotions such as an explosive feeling of anger or joy. For Stern the confusion lies in the fact that they can be experienced alongside such emotions and are therefore difficult to separate, and additionally have generally had no identifying word or theorising of their own. Like Stern with his ‘vitality affects’, I wish to open up discussion of kinetic ways of feeling. Such feelings are important in considering the act of activism as they can activate and deactivate the potential for action, by which I do not mean that they produce or destroy this potential but rather involve an opening up or closing off to such potential. An activating of the potential for action therefore involves becoming aware of an already present or newly emerged capacity for action. Capacity is therefore a central element of the theoretical approach of this chapter and research overall. The main body of this chapter will use capacity to explore the act of activism and draw out the energetic dimensions of such actions, capacity will be explored in two particular senses; the capacity to act and the capacity to mobilise. The first conception of capacity is understood as the capacity of a particular actor to act in themselves, while mobilisation is the considered the capacity to initiate action in others. The purpose of these two conceptions is the way in which they illuminate the other act and actors involved in activism, and therefore counter the two key assumptions ingrained in thinking on activism; that particular actors and acts are deemed to count as activists and activism while others are assumed to be merely passive in the acts and spaces of activism.

As Muller (1997) on the previous page described, the act of activism can be considered as a separation and stepping out of the “tiring ticking” of the “norm”, activism is therefore a form of diversion or a change from the order of things. Such action towards change can take a subtler form than the spectacular acts traditionally considered activism, and it is not necessarily the more overt and spectacular acts which create more or more effective change. By labelling only such acts as activism there is an underplaying of the transformative potential of more subtle acts. While in some ways this is well trodden ground in discussions of resistance, for example Ruddick (2004) and others have (e.g. Pile, 1997, and Sharp *et al*, 2000) referred to debates around the potential of every act to possess resistance qualities and effects, within activist literature itself the more mundane

acts of ‘activists’ and ‘activism’ are only beginning to be called to attention (e.g. Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; and Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). The point here is not to argue the activist potential of all acts in all spaces, but rather the way in which more subtle acts, around overtly activist acts and within activist spaces, are overlooked. So while increasing attention is being paid to everyday acts of activism, the focus is still on *overt* and *intentional* acts of activism, but simply within the everyday lives of (overt) activists instead of their more extraordinary and less frequent intentional acts of activism. The important point here is that such subtle and easily overlooked acts and actors can influence energy dynamics and thus the potential for further action, just as more intentional acts and more noticeable actors. Therefore one central argument is that the capacity to act and to mobilise action in others, in an activist setting just as beyond, is held by *more-than* the obvious actors and acts.

To summarise there are two overall aims of this chapter, both of which involve exploring the dominant assumptions around the act of activism. The first assumption is around *what* counts as an act of activism, the act of activism is largely conceived of as an act of resistance and thus an act of the *power-less* in opposition and direct confrontation with the *power-ful*. Such a conception of activism both limits the types of actions considered activism and underplays the power of activism in itself. The second assumption relates to *who* counts as an activist, when activism is primarily conceived of as an oppositional act this inevitably leads to an overemphasis on particular types of actors, namely the human actors seen to be resisting or opposing. I aim to illuminate this assumption, in addition to the act of activist as merely an oppositional act, in the next section, which reviews the geographical literature on activism.

### **Engaging the Geographies of Activism**

In the geographical literature on activism three forms of action emerge, the first and dominant is ‘direct’ action, which refers to noticeable and dramatic acts of confrontation e.g. protest marches, occupations, or blockades. The other two forms of action are only recently gaining greater attention, the first is the behind the scenes mundane and repetitive day-to-day acts which produce and sustain the more noticeable ‘direct’ actions. That is, the actions involved in organising the

displays of 'direct' action, which might include regular activist organisational meetings, banner painting etc. The second is the collection of acts which form part of a whole lifestyle of activism, where activism is enacted in all acts, rather than just centring around and building up to one-off extra-ordinary forms of 'direct' action. These can be considered different temporal scales of action; activism as a one-off unusual act, activism as a regular act, and activism as continuously enacted in a whole a lifestyle. Equally these can be considered different spatial scales in terms of who and what these acts seek to influence and change: 'direct' forms of activism generally seek to alter national and international authorities and/or corporations as well as mobilise and inform others on a national and international scale, everyday acts of activism are often concerned with the local whether by bringing together local activists and/or taking action locally, finally activism as a lifestyle while it may aim to inspire others nationally and internationally (e.g. through websites, blogs, media etc) is ultimately about changing ones own lifestyle and enacting the change one wants to see through ones own lifestyle. While the focus in the literature, up until recently, has been primarily on the first form or temporal and spatial scale of action, in this research I will explore all three forms of action. This is firstly because such actions cannot be simply and easily separated from one another, secondly to demonstrate that activism is more-than simply an oppositional act (even 'direct' forms of action), and thirdly to demonstrate the presence of energy dynamics in all three scales of action. To simply explore the second and third forms of action is to still reinforce, if indirectly, the first as a confrontational and oppositional act by not exploring the more-than and non-oppositional acts with spaces of 'direct' action.

Despite broader discussions such as those by Sharp *et al* (2000) and Pile (1997) on power and resistance which show how conceiving of them as purely oppositional is simplifying, the act of activism is still predominantly considered in this way in the activist literature; as an oppositional act, an act by the powerless against the powerful. This simplification continues to be produced and reproduced even though, as Brown and Pickerill (2009a) observe: "recent years have seen an expanded interest within Geography in...the spaces of activism, protest and resistance" (1). Perhaps part of the problem is that in this literature rarely is it stipulated exactly what is meant by 'activism', and therefore these

assumptions are not fully acknowledged and brought to light. While a literary definition of the term activism suggests a broad range of actions, in reality the term is “discursively produced” (Maxey, 1999: 200) by activists and non-activists alike and refers primarily to one off forms of action: ‘direct’ action e.g. protests, marches, blockades etc. For example, in terms of wider culture, it is the most noticeable forms of activism which logically receive the most media attention and thus it is a vicious cycle. I refer to such action as ‘direct’ action, rather than simply direct action, as arguably it is no more *direct* than other forms of action in activism, and such a phrasing implies it to be more effective than other actions. The dominant view of direct action as the “best tactic” (Pickerill, 2008a: 484) assumes other forms of activism are less effective and therefore constructs an exclusionary form of activism (Chatterton, 2006), which leads to an emphasis on: “dramatic, physical, ‘macho’ forms of activism with short-term public impacts” (Maxey, 1999: 200). Therefore the wider construction of direct action as the most important form of activism encourages a dominance within the literature on this type of action.

Even where activism is substituted for the term ‘resistance’<sup>5</sup>, and to a lesser extent ‘transgression’<sup>6</sup>, it is still predominately the same very particular form of action being referred to; ‘direct’ action. The term itself, ‘resistance’, further reinforces the view of activism as an oppositional and confrontational act, and an act by the powerless against the powerful. While some define their use of the term very broadly, they still concentrate empirically on the more dramatic and noticeable actions, the out of the ordinary and spectacular acts of activism. Additionally, such definitions of resistance can shed light on further assumptions. Routledge (1997), for example, defines his use of the term ‘resistance’ as referring to “any action imbued with *intent* that attempts to challenge, change or retain particular circumstances relating to societal relations, processes, and/or institutions” (*ibid*: 361, my emphasis). Intention is therefore considered central to whether acts can be considered activism, and this limits not only the actions explored but also the actors, namely those actors who can intentionally decide and those actors intentionally seeking to oppose, protect or change something.

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<sup>5</sup> e.g. Amoore, 2005; J. Anderson, 2004a; Featherstone, 2003; 2005; 2008; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Routledge, 1996; 1997; Routledge and Simons, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> e.g. Cresswell, 1996; Kurtz, 2005; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Routledge, 1996, Routledge and Simons, 1995

No room is allowed for accidental and unintentional acts of activism, or more subtle and easily overlooked actors.

Cresswell is critical of the term ‘resistance’, precisely for this reason of its assumed intentionality: “[there are] a number of theoretical problems I have with the term. The most prominent of these is the issue of *intentionality*. Resistance seems to imply intention - purposeful action directed against some disliked entity with the intention of changing it or lessening its effect.” (Cresswell, 1996: 22, emphasis original). Resistance is also problematic for other reasons, when used as a replacement for the term ‘activism’, as resistance seems to imply an element of struggle, violence and anger, which is not always the case. Cresswell instead prefers the term transgression, defined as: “literally, “crossing a boundary”” (*ibid*: 21): “Transgression, in distinction to resistance, does not, by definition, rest on the intentions of actors but on the *results* – on the “being noticed” of a particular action. The question of intentionality remains an open one” (*ibid*: 23). While transgression leaves intentionality more open, it assumes that such action must have a visible and immediate tangible outcome; it must be ‘noticed’, it must ‘transgress’. Therefore without such an outcome actions do not count as forms of activism, this overlooks that actions in such a setting can have less tangible and have less immediate impacts, which while subtler are arguably no less significant.

Both Cresswell’s transgression and the broader use of ‘resistance’ then privilege noticeable acts, which tend to be so called ‘direct’ action forms of activism; actions which ‘directly’ (meaning ultimately noticeably) seek to confront or subvert the powerful. Such actions tend to be those which involve an overt performance and display e.g. a march, a blockade or an occupation. Part of the problem seems to be that the privileging of particular forms of action, leads to a privileging of particular spaces of activism. Therefore, more ongoing lifestyles of activism, and the behind-the-scenes acts of these more spectacular acts are overlooked. Hodkinson and Chatterton (2006) highlight the preoccupation of academics with obvious spaces of activism, i.e. sites of direct action, over more everyday manifestations of activism referring to the example

of social centres<sup>7</sup> and “other self-organized, radical spaces” (*ibid*: 306) such as “infoshops, squat cafés, protest camps, convergence centres, eco-villages” (*ibid*). Such spaces are both the sites of mundane behind-the-scene acts of activism, and whole lifestyles of activism in which activist’s occupation and day-to-day way of life involve an enacting of ‘the change they wish to see’<sup>8</sup>. For example, Chatterton and Pickerill’s (2010) exploration of low-impact living in which the activist’s whole lifestyle is managed so as to have as a low an environmental impact as possible. The philosophy being that it is impossible, without the complete absence of human life, for a lifestyle to have no impact at all, the aim therefore is to have as little an effect as possible and where possible a positive effect on the environment. In each case, in both mundane and lifestyle actions, activism can be a pivotal part of life i.e. a “way of life” (Pickerill, 2008a: 483). Therefore by overlooking such spaces and such acts there is not only a reinforcing of an exclusionary and simplistic view of the act of activism where the contribution of other acts is underplayed, but additionally a limited understanding of activism is glimpsed.

While the predominant form of action within the literature is that of ‘direct’ action, other forms of action are beginning to emerge (such as the above example of Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010) which move away from the simplified view of the act of activism as an oppositional and confrontational act. Instead such actions highlight the creative and productive potential of acts of activism, rather than simple destructive and subversive, as they can involve the “dreaming” and creating of “something better”: “resistance may take place as a reaction against unfairness and injustice, as a desire to survive intolerable conditions, but it may also involve a sense of remembering and of dreaming of something better.” (Pile, 1997: 30). This side to the act of activism is most overt in the work of Chatterton, Pickerill and Hodkinson, among others, who formed the ‘autonomous geographies’ research collective. However while their empirical work has explored more creative and productive acts of activism (e.g. social centres and low-impact living) their labelling of activist acts still tends towards

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<sup>7</sup> “Occupied social centres (OSCs) turn unused or condemned public buildings and factories into self-organized cultural and political gathering spaces for the provision of radical social services, protest-planning and experimentation with independent cultural production of music, zines, art and pirate micro TV” (Hodkinson and Chatterton, 2006: 306)

<sup>8</sup> Referring to the famous Gandhi quote “We need to be the change we wish to see in the world”.

‘resistance’ with oppositional and confrontational implications: “The kinds of activism that we explore in this paper identify more complex forms of contention and resistance politics that are not simply oppositional but simultaneously interweave ‘anti-’, ‘post-’ and ‘despite-’ capitalisms” (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 476). For Chatterton and Pickerill it is simply that such acts of ‘resistance’ and ‘contention’ are not always *directly* oppositional or against clear and singular figures of opposition.

By calling for greater attention to the more mundane and everyday acts of activism this work, on ‘autonomous geographies’, expands the types of acts considered activism. However, this call is situated in the fact that despite greater attention to ‘the everyday’ in geography more broadly, the everyday in the sense of the mundane and day-to-day, ‘the everyday’ in geographies of activism had been marginalised. Rather than this call being about actually problematising the act of activism itself, and highlighting the way in which it is primarily conceived of as ‘direct’ forms of action. Indeed, Pickerill and Chatterton’s (2006) work further reinforces the centrality of direct action, arguing for the need to explore everyday acts of activism precisely *because* of the way they contribute to direct action rather than as acts of activism in their own right: “Most importantly, we explore the role of everyday practices in these movements’ constitution, as they work alongside – indeed comprise vital building blocks for – mass protests” (731). While Chatterton and Pickerill contradict this argument in their more recent article (2010): “we found that everyday practices are used as building blocks to construct a hoped-for future in the present” (476), there is still a sense in which everyday practices are only activist acts in so far as they contribute to activist goals: “activists act in the present as political subjects and hence are as much goal- and project-orientated as they are interested in movement building and resistance” (480). Moreover, the concern is still with overt and intentional acts of activism, e.g. activist meetings in a social centre, enacted by actors easily labelled as activist (even if unwillingly: in their research activists are critical of this identity). Therefore there is also still a privileging of intentional acts of activism and therefore in turn human agency.

Arguably therefore recent work on everyday practices of activism still reproduces assumptions present in activism literature more generally and earlier work on everyday activism. For example, Routledge (1996) who like Chatterton

and Pickerill situates direct (i.e. those which contribute to an activist goal) and intentional acts as central but simply situated in and inseparable from the everyday: “terrains of resistance...are assembled out of the materials, practices, becomings and knowledges of everyday life” (517). This portrays the everyday as revolving around resistance rather than resistance revolving around the everyday. Yet day-to-day life can just as easily disrupt direct action forms of resistance e.g. participation in a protest being dependent on whether you can get the day off work or find someone to babysit, just as ‘direct’ resistance can itself disrupt day-to-day life e.g. an activist road blockade stopping someone getting to work (Chatterton, 2006).

Therefore this recent expansion of interest in everyday acts of activism has been about acknowledging that such more mundane acts of activism contribute to the more ‘important’ elements, which in Chatterton and Pickerill’s case is activist goals and projects and for Routledge is the building and sustaining of activist networks. Where this is the case it further reinforces the hierarchies of action present within activism discourse, rather than considering them as worthy of attention in their own right and having transformative and productive effects in themselves. Part of the reason for this privileging is arguably assumptions about scales of effect, as outlined in the introductory chapter (Section: The Act of Activism), in which mass and more dramatic actions are assumed to have larger or more significant effects (or the potential for such effects) and effects on a larger scale. While more mundane and easily overlooked acts are assumed to have a lesser potential of effect, and the effects they can have are only on a small and more immediate scale, i.e. that they cannot have effects of the same magnitude as the mass dramatic acts. Though this assumption appears logical, outcomes are not always logical and scale does not always work in this way, to put it simply, in the words of Latour: “A giant in a story is not a bigger character than a dwarf, it just does different things.” (Latour, 1988, 30 cited in Bingham and Thrift, 2000: 286). The important point is that assuming these scales both discourages smaller acts which are not necessarily any less productive of change, and places too much pressure on larger acts to deliver.

Equally Routledge, like Chatterton and Pickerill, is interested in intentional acts enacted by those easily labelled as activists. Routledge for

example highlights the mundane acts which are enacted in and contribute towards an overall activist network: “acting in the network consists of a set of informational, experiential, emotional, and bodily practices: attending meetings and conferences, and performing coordination tasks...the cataloguing and discussion of documents, the drafting and redrafting of documents, etc.” (Routledge, 2008: 201). For Routledge, the acts worthy of attention are those which intentionally contribute, or attempt to contribute, to the maintenance and construction of the network. Work on everyday activism seems to feel the need to justify its study by situating it within larger and longer-term frameworks of action. This tendency appears to be part of a more general trend for situating activism within larger spatial and temporal scales, in particular that of the activist network, Routledge’s concern with activist networks reflects the broader literature’s preoccupation with activist networks.

In addition to overlooking other less obvious actions and actors, the literature which conceives of activism primarily in the form of ‘direct’ action portrays such acts as isolated and free standing. This is to some extent countered by the exploration of more mundane and lifestyle forms of activism, which demonstrates the interconnection and interdependence of such acts on other acts and actors. Therefore, recent work on everyday activism and activism as a networked activity, while it does not always set out to do this, highlights the relationality of the act of activism as always situated within both large and small scale networks of action. In addition to the influences of these relations on such acts, Routledge (2008) for example describes “the way that power emerges from the actions and reactions of people as they act within networks.” (Routledge, 2008: 201). Therefore implicit within network discussions, but not explicitly developed is the influences of relations on the *capacity to act*, referred to here by Routledge as “power”. The concept of the network, or more broadly relationality, links the two concepts to be explored in the main body below; the capacity to act and mobilisation (understood as the capacity to initiate action in others). The power to act or to initiate action, rather than being a tangible and quantifiable capacity and ability, is relational and influenced by relations. Particular relations can for example influence the desire to act, such as the perception of being in a position of powerlessness (which activism is so often assumed to involve) can

become a channel for and source of capacity for action itself. Networks of relations can then in turn become networks of energy.

To summarise, an exploration of the activist literature reveals a hierarchy of action in which particular forms of action reside at the top as the most important and effective, while other acts are situated below, and how below they are is dependent on their contribution to the top form of action. While explorations of everyday acts of activism contribute to a broader understanding of the act of activism beyond a single isolated act of 'direct' action, they still centralise and privilege the act of 'direct' action and therefore equally the perceived en-actor of the 'direct' action. This dominance of 'direct' action in turn means that the act of activism is primarily conceived of as a confrontational act by the powerless in opposition to the powerful. Power relations, and thus the political, are central at the expense of the more-than-political. Such a simplified view of the act of activism overlooks power in other guises such as the power of the act of activism in itself, and the fact that such actions can be productive as opposed to simply destructive, productive of both change and power to change. Therefore, through the exploration below of capacity and mobilisation I wish to demonstrate the importance of exploring actions beyond the obvious acts in activism. Not simply because all acts in activism are connected and interdependent, as the everyday activist literature highlights, but rather because such less obvious acts can equally be productive of capacity to act and therefore the capacity for change. The focus on and centralising of direct action has also led to a entrenching of passive and active labels, with the enacting of direct action deemed active and other elements e.g. the clutter of activist (banners, paints, chairs, leaflets etc) spaces deemed not actors but merely passive 'things'. Exploring the more-than-political elements of activism, namely energy, allows for the challenging of these engrained assumptions.

### **The Capacity to Act**

Capacity, while rarely overtly referred to in the literature is present implicitly. For example, the different types of activist action outlined in the review of the literature above, e.g. direct or confrontational spectacular action vs. mundane everyday or repeated acts, are assumed to require different capacities;

the spectacular activism is assumed to require an intense short-term capacity, while more mundane repeated acts are assumed to require a lower and more long-term capacity.

The assumptions evident in the predominant language of the act of activism (e.g. ‘resistance’ and ‘direct action’), with such action seen as oppositional i.e. a “struggle” or “fight” (e.g. J. Anderson, 2004a; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010), are in turn engrained with particular assumptions around power. Activists are seen to act in a position of lesser power against a greater power. They act then *in spite of* a position of powerlessness, where power is considered in a particular form i.e. dominance, control, or capital. Framing activism in this way implies that the ultimate goal of activist acts is the overthrowing or reversal of this power divide – an overwhelming and seemingly hopeless goal. Rather than, more modestly, about creating and collectively contributing to the potential for change (not necessarily creating change itself) and encouraging a restlessness with the status quo. The key point here then, in this section is that by framing the act of activism in this way the power of activism itself is overlooked; the power or capacity to act towards change. Furthermore, that such power (the power or energy of activism) is not necessarily about end goals and achieving or failing to meet these goals. Additionally, this framing of activism means particular agents or actors are assumed to have the capacity to act while others are labelled passive, namely non-human actors. Therefore that such simplistic active/passive divides are still ingrained in understanding of the act of activism despite the problematising of them in action theory more broadly. Overlooking such acts and actors in turn overlooks the potential of such acts/actors to contribute to change and activist energies more broadly.

The power or energies of activism is arguably overlooked with the literature precisely because of the way power is framed and understood in the literature. Power, while broadly understood as the capacity to act: “The word power comes from the Latin word *potere*, meaning ‘to be able’” (Sharp *et al*, 2000: 2-3), is narrowed within activism literature to refer to a very particular capacity: the capacity to dominate. Little room is made for other powers or capacities, such as the capacities deployed in activism. As Sharp *et al* argue, in

traditional accounts of power and resistance, power is considered a coherent dominating force, while resistance is oppositional and essentially futile:

Orthodox accounts of power...tend to equate power straightforwardly with domination. Thus power becomes almost exclusively conceived of as the 'power to dominate' or as 'dominating power'. Similarly, orthodox accounts of resistance...tend to pit resistance against power or against domination (understood as coherent oppressive force), or even portray dominating power as so ubiquitous (as just so 'powerful') that acts of resistance appear either futile or trivial. (Sharp *et al*, 2000: 2)

As Sharp *et al* demonstrate, this conception of resistance and power is simplistic and limiting. The argument here, then, is that acts of power and acts of resistance (or activism) are not conceived as simple oppositions, but rather intertwined and interlinked, as Foucault wrote: "where there is power, there is resistance" (1990: 95). Each needs the other in order to exist, ultimately without power there is nothing to resist, and without resistance (or the potential for resistance) there is no need for power. For Foucault power is a productive force which makes things happen, including 'resistance', rather than simply a property or a thing which is held and owned by someone/thing. Power is after all a "mode of action", and a mode of action which acts "upon actions":

"In effect, what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future...a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other" (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of re-sponses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up." (Foucault, 1982: 789)

One ‘other’ here could be considered an activist and activism one form of response to this relationship of power, the activist must be ‘recognised’ as such and ‘maintained’ as a person capable of acting in order for the relationship of power to be enacted. In a similarly vein, and following Foucault, Allen (2003) considers this in the form of an “immanent” conception of power which “conceives of power as *inseparable* from its effects” (65):

power as something which works on subjects as well as through them – at one and the same time. On this understanding, there is no external reference point to power, no force imposing itself from the outside to consider, only the set of relations and circumstances that one finds oneself with. Power does not show itself because it is implicated in all that we are and all that we inhabit. (Allen, 2003: 65)

If instead we conceive of dominating power and resistance in this way; as inseparable and intertwined, and power itself more broadly in the sense of capacity, then we can see that all action involves power, action cannot occur without the capacity to act. Rather than activism as an act in spite of powerless, activism is an act producing and performing power. Such an understanding can be read as implicit within this language of resistance, rather than completely absent; resistance as the power to resist, to struggle, to fight, the power to act in this way. While implicit, such forms of power are rarely made explicit, as Sharp *et al* (2000) demonstrate, referring to traditional accounts of power and resistance they write: “In such accounts, moreover, matters are rarely conceived of in terms of the ‘power to resist’, what might be called ‘resisting power’”(2). They define and elaborate the ‘power to resist’ or “resisting power”:

We understand *resisting power* as that power which attempts to set up situations, groupings and actions which resist the impositions of dominating power...In order for all of these resistances to occur, power has to be exercised and realised, both by the leaders (in a form that can become dominating in its own right) but also in a more ‘grass-roots’ fashion by everyday people finding that they have the power to do and to change things.

*(ibid: 3)*

Here power involves a realisation of capacity: “power has to be exercised and realised...everyday people finding that they have the power to do”. By marginalising action, the nature of action within activism, of the process of becoming active and in-active has been under-theorised e.g. the realising of capacity. However here, just as in the activism literature more broadly, resisting power is implied to be a purely human capacity. While Routledge (2008), in his work on activist networks, acknowledges that agency is possessed by more than merely human actors, he still privileges human agency, arguing against “recent accounts of actor networks” which “downplay the embodied practices of the human actors” (201). It is precisely because of the idea of capacity and the power to act that he argues that human agency is more important:

However, while network processes are social and natural they are not so in equal measure, since social relations may be disproportionately directive... Therefore, it is not the computers, boats, airplanes, etc that direct the work of actor networks, but the social relations the human intentionality of enacting and embodying the network. Actor networks such as PGA Asia are not only networks of association, but also material entities with modes of operation, biases, and inequalities of power. The nonhuman actors, while important to the association and, indeed, not always fully within human control...remain insufficient by themselves to realize ANT's political project

(Routledge, 2008: 215)

To demonstrate the problematic nature of this privileging of human agency, one could think of two contrasting and stereotypical acts of activism, writing to a politician and marching in a protest. In the first example, if asked ‘who is the actor?’, one may immediately state the writer of the letter, but what about the pen and paper or computer, the event or thing which instigated the letter. And what is the act here, the forming of the idea of the letter, is it the writing of the letter, or the paper’s act of being written on. Beyond the surface of these acts and actors there are also clearly more complex actions and actors. In

the case of the march who is the actor; the marcher, the banner, the chants/music, or the street, and what is the action; the movement and chanting of the protestor, the movement of the banner in the wind, the street's act of being walked on. The examples here draws on Ahmed's (2010b) analogy of the act of crossing a road, which clearly demonstrates the ingrained thinking in what counts as an act and an agent, and what elements are passive and active:

We learn that we must say that the chicken crossed the road. We must not say that the road was crossed by the chicken. In such a case, the road does nothing, and yet it is the grammatical subject of the sentence. We must preserve the *fantasy* that the subject, even the animal-subject, is the one who acts. The chicken must come first in the sentence. But does the road do nothing in the event of the crossing? The road is the provider; it provides the point at which we can cross, at which we can go from one side to the other. The road is an effect of past actions, of decisions taken to allow crossing points. Rather than hold on to the binary opposition of active/passive, we can challenge the opposition, and we can do so by showing how that which has been deemed passive, as just doing nothing, is doing something and even provides the conditions of *possibility* for doing something.

(Ahmed, 2010b: 209, emphasis original)

Ahmed's example of the road of course echoes Heidegger's use of the bridge. In both cases the point is that seemingly passive 'things' are always doing something it is simply that this something is not always acknowledged: in the case of the road the act of crossing the road is brought into being by the road, it cannot occur without it, with the bridge the banks are brought into existence:

The bridge swings over the stream "with cause and power". It does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks *only* as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge designedly causes them to lie across from each other. One side is set off against the other by the bridge. Nor do the banks stretch along the stream as indifferent border strips of

the dry land. With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them.

(Heidegger, 1971: 152, own emphasis)

The key point here is that elements in activism automatically deemed passive are often far from passive; they can provide the ‘possibility’ and conditions for particular acts of activism. Clearly then in the above example of the letter writing and protest march the paper/pen and street provide the conditions and ‘possibility’ for the act of writing or marching. What the above examples of acts, a protest march and letter writing, point to is the multiplicity of the ‘act’ of activism; it is perhaps more appropriate to think of ‘acts’ of activism. But also, particularly agents and acts are clearly privileged, while other elements are considered passive and inactive. As mentioned above, such assumptions around the act of activism reflect broader assumptions around action itself, namely that only human actors have agency while other elements are merely passive, Bennett (2010) refers to this as a particular ‘habit’ of thinking:

The philosophical project [here] is to think slowly an idea that runs fast through modern heads: the idea of matter as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert. This habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings) is a “partition of the sensible,” to use Jacques Ranciere’s phrase. (*ibid*: vii)

While more broadly in geography these ‘habits’ of thinking have been interrogated, they are still ingrained in thinking around the act of activism. Furthermore, this divide or ‘partition’ between passive and active seems more pronounced in activism literature, as though activist agency was somehow even more of a purely human act than other ‘human’ act. Part of the problem seems to be the ‘romance of resistance’ (Sparke, 2008): “a romance that is initiated by assumptions about autonomous action and animated by diverse forms of idealism; a romance that ultimately imagines agency in the existential and ageographical terms of some seminal and heroically universalized human spirit” (1). Within such an understanding to not privilege such actors and their most intentional acts is to undermine their actions and therefore be on the side of the

dominant power. However this need not be the case, and is certainly not the intention, the desire to understand the complexities of such acts more fully cannot be considered a hostile act. Indeed, bringing the works of theorists such as Bennett into discussions of the act of activism can add to the activist project, by encouraging activists to work with and take account of the ‘disposition of things’ (Jullien, 1995) to enable and activate the potential for action. Drawing on Francois Jullien’s work on *shi*, a Chinese word referring to the disposition or propensity of a collection of elements, Bennett highlights the way in which questioning our habits of thinking opens up space for a more collective and interdependent understanding of agency:

An assemblage owes its agentic capacity to the vitality of the materialities that constitute it. Something like this congregational agency is called *shi* in the Chinese tradition...*Shi* is the style, energy, propensity, trajectory, or élan inherent to a specific arrangement of things. Originally a word used in military strategy, *shi* emerged in the description of a good general who must be able to read and then ride the *shi* of a configuration of moods, winds, historical trends, and armaments: *shi* names the dynamic force emanating from a spatio-temporal configuration rather than from any particular element within it. (Bennett, 2010: 34-35)

Therefore another key point to draw out here, in addition to assumptions around passive and active agents, is the way in which actions and actors themselves are considered singular and independent. For example, in the typical activist example of the protest march used above the single actor is the protestor and the single act the act of marching in the protest, yet there are clearly other actions and actors at work within this seemingly singular act. Bennett (2010) demonstrates the complexities of agency more eloquently through the example of creating a book:

The sentences of this book also emerged from the confederate agency of many striving macro- and microactants: from “my” memories, intensions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window,

or the air or particulates in the room, to name only a few of the participants. What is at work here on the page is an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power. (*ibid*: 23)

In other words, it can be argued that there is not a single autonomous actor and act but rather a whole ‘cluster’ of actors and acts at work in each ‘act’ of activism: “an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces” (*ibid*: 21). Though, to acknowledge this multiplicity of acts and actors at work in each assumed singular act is not to say that all actors possess an equal capacity, or that all actions possess an equal capacity of outcome. Routledge (2008) demonstrates this to an extent, though only in relation to human actors of an activist network, by highlighting the way in which their capacity is influenced by their position in the network and their relation to other aspects within it:

the processes of social inequality (for example, in terms of more and less powerful actors) and intentionality...in part, determine the contours of network association...There are reasons (intentions) for putting together networks, and the process of circulation (of information, people, etc) is unequal. Some ‘circulate’ more than others, creating differential social relations, whereby power gets centred on certain people and things. (Routledge, 2008: 201)

Capacity here is circumstantial rather than the specific power of an individual in themselves, therefore an activists’ power relates to their position within a network, and this position enables them to act and influence actions within that network. In this context capacity is always relational, and is drawn from this very relation, therefore without this relation there is no capacity. Though for Routledge, while capacity to act within the network is influenced by activists’ position in the network and the relation of power to others in the network, capacity itself is ultimately ruled by ‘intentionality’ and the intention or will of the (human) activist. This mirrors the activist literature more broadly

which focuses overwhelmingly on intentional acts of activism, reflecting the way in which activism is perceived as always an intentional act. Yet, the networks to which Routledge refers can form unintentionally or involve unintentional elements, as acts of activism themselves can occur unintentionally, or involve multiple unexpected outcomes. Part of this multiplicity and potentiality lies in the multiplicity of the act of activism, each apparent ‘act’ contains numerous performative gestures and moments i.e. numerous acts, and numerous agents. Allen (2003) poses that this multiplicity and unpredictability is inherent in the very nature of power more broadly:

it is suggestive of the open-ended nature of power, where even the best-planned techniques of power somehow do not take hold in the way imagined. The result, to borrow a phrase from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is a kind of ‘molecular soup’, where unexpected elements come into play and things never quite work out in the manner anticipated.

*(ibid: 66)*

The focus of the next section, mobilisation, like capacity itself more broadly can occur unintentionally and unexpectedly. In activism literature mobilisation is often understood in terms of intentionality, as it is often an intention of many form of activism to mobilise others and more others, and while this intention can succeed, such mobilisation can also be brought about unintentionally.

### **The Act of Mobilising**

The act of activism, especially in the case of ‘direct’ action, is often considered to have a dual purpose, firstly to oppose and confront power through the very act of activism, and secondly to inspire others to take similar action. The latter is often referred to as ‘mobilising’, a phrase encountered within both the activist and academic vocabulary. This use of ‘mobilise’ is both metaphorical – with a state of political inaction viewed as stationary, while activism is portrayed as a state of constant action or motion – as well as literal. While activism is not literally a constant state of motion, which the term mobilise implies, it refers to a

sense in which action and the number of those acting in relation to a particular goal or issue has increased and become more frequent. The idea of mobilisation as a key act of activism clearly traces its origins to the dominant history of activism, a story in which mass amounts of people become mobilised, an event occurs or tension escalates until eventually action erupts on a mass scale. These mass forms of activism, which ‘mobilisation’ is so often associated with, were nearly always uprisings *against* something. Therefore the dominant construction of the act of activism, as an oppositional act by the powerless, becomes reproduced in the word mobilisation. It is especially implied in the need to ‘mobilise’, which implies a strategy against or in opposition to something. But also, it implies a *need* to mobilise others, that is, a need to recruit others to a cause in order to develop an effective opposition, which suggests that the opposition is currently more powerful and/or greater in number.

Within the dominant history of activism ‘mobilisation’ is often associated with mass ‘social movements’. By reflecting on mobilisation through the encompassing phrase for activism: ‘social movements’ (Nicholls, 2007), we can see that, in addition to implying a gathering of actors *against* something, mobilisation implies *a direction*. Implicit within this phrase ‘social movements’ is motion and movement. Social movements implies both a mass activating of people in relation to a particular issue, but also a movement or direction of this action towards a particular intentional end or aim. Yet, as I will demonstrate later in the empirical chapters, there are often multiple and unexpected outcomes to an act of activism, rather than a single coherent end. Each act of activism has the potential to initiate multiple outcomes or futures, including both unintentional and unexpected futures.

Rather than conceiving of mobilisation as an intentional and oppositional mass action towards a particular end, like capacity mobilisation can be used to get to the root of the act of activism. Mobilisation here is understood as a particular form of capacity: the capacity to activate action in other agents. Like capacity more broadly, the same assumptions are ingrained in thinking around mobilisation, namely that it occurs between human subjects and that other non-human elements merely facilitate or impede this process. Additionally, mobilisation is assumed to have particular actions as desired outcomes, namely overt intentional acts of activism that are considered to be worth the process of

mobilisation (often ‘direct’ actions), and that if these forms of actions do not occur then mobilisation has failed. These are the two key assumptions here: that in the context of activism the capacity to activate action in others is often considered within a very narrow frame of actors and acts.

Mobilisation is assumed to occur in two main ways: activating the ability of another to act, or activating an already present ability for action. The first form of mobilisation involves a capacity which can be created, for example through the learning of particular tools and techniques, and therefore an expanding of potentiality. The second concerns the presence of an already existing capacity, through which mobilisation can activate or awaken. For example, mobilisation often aims to ‘empower’, either by directly encouraging others to act or indirectly by performing activism and in the process inspiring others to act in a similar way. This enacting or activating is often considered a central element of all acts of activism, it is therefore this particular transition and space between potential and actual, between inaction and the beginnings of action, which in some ways is the most important space of activist action. The implicit assumption being that once a subject has been activated they will create their own momentum and mechanisms to continue, that they will remain active, and that this transition from ‘inactive’ to ‘active’ is the most difficult and important. Although this mobilising is equally considered to occur as a re-mobilisation when activists ‘burnout’ or ‘drop out’ of regular participation.

Just like capacity more broadly, as discussed above, the capacity to mobilise is assumed to be a purely a human capacity. Mobilisation is assumed to involve individuals or groups of activists mobilising others and each other, yet as Jon Anderson’s (2004a) example of an environmental protest camp demonstrates, while it is not his explicit intention to demonstrate this, spaces can clearly mobilise as well:

By politicising space in this way activists provided for themselves their own form of public space. A platform from which they could not only articulate their political viewpoints, but also recruit interested parties. Their EDA camp became a “homeplace” (after Hooks, 1990), a safe haven where the languages, customs and behaviours were familiar and through simply existing reinforced and refuelled an individual and

collective sense of empowerment. As such a “homeplace” the camp attracted a diversity of inhabitants and supporters. These included many of those locals who became radicalised following the mainstream campaign against the quarry extension (*ibid*: 110)

The mobilising or energising potential of the camp is made possible not simply through the acts of activists present but through the nature of the space more generally; e.g. its homely qualities involve the very elements of the space itself. Equally, the surrounding natural elements which are part of the reason for the site’s protection are also involved, being immersed in and physically close to this space can have a mobilising effect, and therefore this includes the natural elements of the camp. Mobilisation therefore is about more-than simply activist relations and direct interaction, spaces themselves, including their various aspects and elements, can become mobilising forces and can contribute to the overall process of mobilisation.

In Anderson’s example, of a protest camp set up in responses to a quarry extension on woodland and meadowland important to the local community, the impression given is that the circumstances mobilised the community, implying that any community subject to similar circumstances would act in the same way. There is often an implicit assumption that politics mobilises, and mobilises equally, and therefore that such subjects could easily be exchanged for others if these others were subject to the same circumstance. An event occurs, subjects react, this reaction leads to a mobilising, a state of acting. In this view one might consider the politics or political feelings themselves as the mobilising force. In other words politics itself considered as the capacity for action, and producing the conditions for action. The politics here is often of a very specific kind, namely an injustice. However such a view, of politics itself as a mobilising force, simplifies and skips over the complexities of capacity and action. These complexities can include temporal elements, while Anderson situates this action within the broader environmental activist movement there are more specific histories at work here, and not only in relation to the site itself, but also the mobilised.

The complexities of mobilisation are often overlooked in the activism literature. While there is a sense in the literature that activists have been

mobilised and seek to mobilise others, there is little attention to the intricacies of this process, of the ways in which subjects become mobilised and mobilise in turn, or become de-mobilised. Yet such intricacies are frequently discussed and reassessed within activist discourse, take for example the sustainable activism work of the Activist Support Network (2012b) which concerns itself with dispensing advice on burnout and more emotionally sustainable activism. Or the discussions which preceded the emergence of the Transition Town movement, (Hopkins, 2008) around the demobilising nature of previous environmentalist rhetoric that focused on the negative and catastrophic future which could result without appropriate action.

## **Conclusions**

Discussions such as the above within activist discourse, point to the importance of ‘energy’ in relation to mobilisation. Ultimately, it can be seen that mobilisation is about energising action, by activating and expanding the potential for action. Mobilisation is partly implied as a contagious force which spreads between actors; the action of some initiating a state of action of others. Here action is contagious on being seen or heard, and therefore action itself possessing potential energetic qualities beyond its immediate enacting. Energy, as a concept, therefore allows for a more in depth analysis of mobilisation and mobilising as an action. Additionally, employing energy enables a movement away from the privileging of mass actions which form part of mobilisations to the complexities of action itself.

Power is clearly a key theme running through activism literature; activism is assumed to be a power struggle rather than an actualisation of power i.e. power framed as the capacity to act. Power or capacity is in this literature, unlike action literature more broadly (e.g. Bennett, 2010, and Ahmed, 2010b), attributed to human subjects i.e. activists, and the acts of activism are considered those intentional overt acts of activism. Clearly activism literature and activism discourse more broadly is ingrained with these particular assumptions around action. The aim therefore is to counter these assumptions through the concept of energy, and bring into focus the power to act or ‘resist’ and the complexities of this process, a process currently sidelined. Energy here is not meant as a simple

replacement for the term power, and therefore imagined to be something which can be held and stored. The broader assumptions of power outlined by Allen (2003) can equally be considered to extend to assumptions around energy, i.e. that energy is tangible and measurable.

Exploring the capacity to act and to mobilise allowed for the importance of potentiality to be unearthed, the capacity to act is ultimately about the potential present or perceived to be present, while mobilisation is about activating or expanding this potentiality. Rather than marking a definite source or driver of action, mobilisation ultimately marks the potential for a moment and transition from one way of acting to another. Mobilisation therefore implies a potential beginning, a potential for something new, an implication which gets to the very root of the idea of action itself according to Hannah Arendt: “To act, in its most general sense, means to take initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein* “to begin,” “to lead,” and eventually “to rule,” indicates), to set something into motion” (1958: 177). Therefore to have the capacity ‘to act’ is to have the capacity ‘to begin’, and to act in activism is to begin a change. This beginning can be the beginning of a new state or a new way of acting in a subject/object, alternatively this can be the beginning of a new state of affairs, whether in a minor or major way, as activism is ultimately about change.

Additionally, rather than thinking of capacity for activism in terms of a human centred tangible and quantifiable capacity I wish to think in terms of the conditions for action and a more distributed idea of activism capacity (Bennett, 2010). Such a shift in thinking is important as the hierarchies of action evident and reproduced through the academic activist literature are not purely a conceptual and theoretical concern, such hierarchies exist in the field and can influence energy dynamics. Labelling certain actions as lesser can have disempowering and de-motivating, and thus de-energising, influences on the actor.

On surveying the activist literature what is most striking, besides the lack of exploration of the capacities outline above; the capacity to act and activate others, is the absence of the liveliness of activism. Instead activism is portrayed almost as a cold mechanical act, rather than a messy, passionate, vibrant, and lively collection of acts and actors.

### Chapter 3

#### The Energies of Activism: Potentiality, Affect, and the More-than-Human

In the previous chapter I began exploring the geographical activism literature. Through this exploration several assumptions around the act of activism were brought to the surface. Firstly, particular actors and actors are privileged, namely the ‘direct’ actions of overt (human) activists, this in turn leads to particular assumptions around the cause or root of such acts. Specifically actions of this type are considered passionate and overtly emotional acts (whether anger, outrage, hope etc), which require a high intensity of feeling to occur: “to engage in direct action you have to feel *enough* passion to put your values into practice; it is literally embodying your feelings, performing your politics.” (Jordan, 1998: 134, my emphasis). By this logic if people do not partake in activism it is because they do not *feel enough* or that activists somehow *feel more*, which seems to be part of the ‘romance of resistance’ (Sparke, 2008) and a long history of placing activists on pedestals as “the bearer of an exceptional kind of power”<sup>1</sup> (Bennett, 2010: 34). Such a logic of action means passions and emotions are labelled as the ‘cause’ of action, the act of activism being the ‘effect’ or outcome. The point here in this chapter is that along with particular assumptions about *what* the act of activism is, and *who* enacts it, there are also assumptions ingrained in the literature about *where* such acts come from.

Arguably the desire to pinpoint the ‘where’ of activism is essentially about seeking the *energy* or energies of activism. It is therefore the where of the act of activism that this chapter will turn, specifically the emerging sub-field of activism literature on the emotions and affects of activism. This literature posits the where of activism as emotions or affects. The role of emotions and affect in activism within this literature is therefore generally considered in a very simplistic causal way; emotions and affects initiate or sustain activism. There is little in-depth discussion within this literature of how emotions/affects do this or whether this relationship can be understood as a simple cause and effect.

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<sup>1</sup> Here Bennett is referring to the typical assumptions around human agency rather than activist agency specifically but this phrasing seems to encapsulate well how activist agency is typically conceived.

Additionally, this emerging literature positions emotions or affects as the *main* element propelling and creating activist action. While previously this was considered politics and political ideals/beliefs, there is still the same desire to assign agency to a prime aspect. Although, it is noticeable that the act of activism is still often referred to as a ‘political act’, as opposed to a performance or enacting of emotions or a passionate emotional act (with the exception of Jordan above who refers to it as both a performing of politics and an embodying of feelings). Equally, this shift from politics to emotions/affects still privileges human agency, it is simply that instead of ‘rational’ human thought and views, human feelings whether pre-cognitive or cognitive are the catalysts, and therefore human agents the prime actors.

The tendency within the literature to consider particular emotions or emotions in general as the ‘thing’ driving the act of activism is part of a broader tendency to consider energy, in terms of the potential for action, as a singular quantifiable thing or force. This is, as Brown writes, the ‘everyday’ understanding or use of energy: “This is the everyday concept of energy: something invisible which produces motion or activity, but in producing activity is used up, so it needs to be replenished.” (Brown, 1999: 4). As Brown identifies, in this everyday understanding of energy, where energy refers to an invisible force producing action, energy is considered to be ‘used up’ in action much like a battery, and this battery metaphor is common within everyday use of energy, for example people often talk of needing to “recharge” their “batteries”. It was this everyday use of energy which I found myself easily slipping into at the beginning of this research, but over the course of the fieldwork and ‘analysis’ I began to consider energy, in this context, as a process rather than a thing. Describing a similar shift in perception, and one of several points of inspiration I encountered in the broader literature, Summers-Effler writes of her shift from considering activist groups as ‘things’ to ‘processes’:

It took awhile to experience the gestalt shift that allowed me to see that these groups didn’t *have* processes; they *were* processes...The persistence of individual membership became far less important than the persistence of the group as an emergent actor...Rather than asking how groups maintained membership, I should have been asking how they persisted as

centers of action despite political changes and fluctuations in member involvement. Over time, I could see that what we generally think of as “groups” are rhythmic patterns of organization. Sometimes these groups were entities within fields of action, other times they were contentious fields where members vied for power, and still other times they were coalitions focused on distant goals.

(Summers-Effler, 2010: x, emphasis original)

Summers-Effler’s observation is pivotal because a similar thinking can be applied to activist action as well as activist groups, that is, action here does not merely *have* processes, such as an emotional response to an event or issue leading to an activist act, but rather action here can be perceived of *as* processes. Rather than the act of activism being considered as an end-point or outcome, it is caught up in and part of these processes (the processes of activist energy dynamics), it cannot be separated out from them. Therefore there is no exact *where* of the act of activism which can be pinpointed, but rather processes which can be further explored.

Rather than a thing or “invisible force” (Brown, 1999) behind action, energy is thought about here in terms of potentiality, a potentiality which is influenced by varying degrees of openness and alignment to: particular actions, relations, and spaces. These three aspects (actions, relations, spaces) therefore form the structure to follow and are considered three key aspects of energy. While in each case it is a subject’s alignment and openness to each which is important for energy dynamics, they are not considered separate categories, the overall purpose is to consider how these three aspects align to create the conditions for action. Actions do not refer solely to ‘human’ acts, as arguably no act can be considered to be solely enacted by a human agent, or solely intentional overt fully actualised acts. Similarly here relations does not refer purely to human relations but instead includes the relations between humans and ‘things’, and between ‘things’ and other ‘things’. And here space is used as an all encompassing word to refer to clutter of spaces, that is, the various elements which compose activist spaces, and how such clutter interacts with the processes of action. Each term therefore operates as a broad category through which to explore different aspects of activist agency.

Each of these three aspects; action, relations, space, will form the structure of this chapter, as well as the empirical chapters which follow. Each section is build around a particular aspect of the understanding of activist agency being offered here. Firstly, the act of activism as involving multiple: acts (Action and Energy), relations (Affect and Energy), and actors (Energy and Space). Secondly, each section seeks to counter a particular ingrained assumption around ‘energy’: that energy is a simple catalyst for action (Action and Energy), that energy is a single ‘thing’ which can be caught and transmitted between bodies (Affect and Energy), and that it refers to a property usually considered human (Energy and Space). The overall focus will be the theme of ‘burnout’ and in particular a quote from an activist during my masters research will be continuously returned to in each section outlined above. This quote has a special significance as it formed part of the beginnings of this research, and it allows me to elaborate my use of the term energy, and demonstrate how this use of the term allows us to view burnout differently.

Apart from Summers-Effler’s work, the literature on the emotions and affects of activism served as an inspiration of how *not* to think about energy, this literature like the affect literature more broadly shares a similar purpose of seeking to understand action. The aim here in this chapter is to bridge together affect’s implicit use of energy, in relation to the potential for action, with the activism literature. I will draw out the assumptions around the energies of activism, and the ingrained cultural assumptions around energy more generally, and in turn outline my alternative use of energy, using particular energetic readings (Bennett, 2010; Collins, 1990; 2004). Just as in the previous chapter I will begin with a review of the activism literature, in this case a review of the specific sub-field of the activism literature concerned with the emotions and affects of activism.

### **(Re)Establishing emotions in the Activism Literature**

Recent literature on activism has begun to question what drives activism, what in other words is the *energy* of activism. Typically the energy of activism has been considered to be political beliefs and ideals, whereas by contrast now attention is turning to emotions and affects as drivers of activism. I am referring

in particular to the emerging literature on the emotions and affects of activism, in this literature 'energy' is present implicitly and in passing mention but is rarely discussed explicitly. For example, energy is implicit in reference to 'emotionally sustainable' activism, which is ultimately about avoiding 'burnout' in which burnout is conceived of as extreme energy absence or depletion, and it was this topic on which the first themed geographical journal issue (*Emotion, Space and Society*, vol. 2, no. 1) on the emotions of activism was concerned: "Activism and Emotional Sustainability". It is this issue in particular which will form the main focus of the following literature review.

In the cause and effect model of activism which dominates the literature to be explored below, 'energy' is the cause and the effect is usually considered to be direct action. There is an implicit assumption that dramatic oppositional actions are more draining: "There are substantial emotional costs involved in the very act of taking a resistive stance on an issue, particularly when one is opposing the dominant beliefs of society." (Brown and Pickerill, 2009b: 28). Similarly Jasper writes of spectacular and out of the ordinary forms of activism ("unusual"), implying direct action forms, as involving "even more, and more complex, feelings" (1998: 398). This section therefore focuses on moving away from a simply cause and effect model of energy, where the 'presence' of energy causes action and its absence halts action, as this model not only simplifies the act of activism but also assumes only particular actions count.

At times particular emotions are considered catalysts for action. For example, Klandermans (1997) refers to 'hope' while Henderson (2008) describe 'anger' as the driver of activism; one activist interviewed by Henderson's describes anger and courage as "the energy that drives" (2008: 28) him. More recently this causal relationship between emotions and the act of activism can be seen in a special themed edition of *Emotion, Space, and Society* entitled *Activism and Emotional Sustainability*. In the editorial introduction to the edition Brown and Pickerill write: "Outside Geography, various scholars have begun only recently to consider the emotions that inspire and sustain activism, that are provoked by it" (Brown and Pickerill, 2009a: 1). In other words that emotions can "inspire and sustain" the act of activism, and therefore that they have a casual role in the initiation and continuation of the act of activism: emotions

“serve as triggers for activism” (Brown and Pickerill, 2009b: 26). This assumption is reproduced in other articles from the special edition:

Laura Pulido (2003: 48) discusses the ‘interior life of politics’ to situate emotion (and ethics) as ‘inside of us as individuals’, as an ‘unspoken and often unrecognised force’ compelling us to action. (Askins, 2009: 7)

The recent rise in attention to emotions in the study of social movements and collective action has focused on emotions as an important factor in the emergence, recruitment and sustenance of movement activity and culture. (Gruszczynska, 2009: 45)

As both the above quotes demonstrate this assumptions of emotion as the cause of activism runs through the whole breadth of the field on the emotions and affects of activism. Referring to Pulido’s article, a key geography article of the field, Askins describes emotions as a “‘force’ compelling us to” act. While Gruszczynska writes of emotions as an “important factor” in the “emergence” and sustaining of activism, which while suggesting emotion as one factor among many still positions emotion as a factor *causing* activism. Additionally ingrained in both these quotes are assumptions about the agency of the human activist, namely that it is solely a human agent who acts in activism and that their energy or drive for action comes from within them.

What an exploration of these new and previously overlooked aspects of activism, the emotions and affects of activism, allows is a fresh look at activism itself, and an illuminating and countering of the assumptions ingrained in academic understanding and exploration of activism. Yet few, aside from Horton and Kraftl (2009) discussed below, have seized this opportunity. The problem in part perhaps is that the literature on the affects and emotions of activism has only critiqued the previous activism literature in this sense, for the absence of emotion/affect, and has not used this as an opportunity to undertake a more comprehensive review of activist literature in itself. Horton and Kraftl unpack the problematic assumptions of this literature so far, one of which being the reading of emotion as “straightforward ‘prompts’ for action, or as ‘tools’ or ‘resources’ to be used, or acted upon, by activists”:

A tendency to take for granted a particular notion of agency. Fundamental to many accounts of activism are a particular, and rather muscular, idea(l) of activist agency: that is, activism is assumed to be an active, self-aware, straightforwardly intentional act towards a particular end (as critiqued by Flam, 2005; Ward, 2007). A particular, somewhat instrumental, conceptualisation of emotion is often central to this agency and sense of purpose: it is common to read of emotions as straightforward ‘prompts’ for action, or as ‘tools’ or ‘resources’ to be used, or acted upon, by activists. (Horton and Kraftl, 2009: 17)

In place of an intentional force, Horton and Kraftl “posit a more complex, ambiguous relationship between emotion and activism.” (*ibid*). Perhaps the most important point they make in this context is that: “we are not sure that it is always so easy to discern precisely *where activism comes from, and ends.*” (*ibid*: 22, my emphasis). By where activism ‘comes from’ they refer to the source or cause of activism imagined as a particular clearly defined point which can be pinpointed, often conceived of as a particular emotion e.g. hope, anger, outrage etc. By where activism ‘ends’ they refer to both spaces and practices of activism, the way in which particular practices are considered activism and others not, and activism is considered to reside in particular spaces, and spaces beyond this are outside of activism: “some kind of causal dialectic is retained despite talk of the blurring of ‘activism’ with ‘everyday lives’ which are ‘outside’ activism” (*ibid*: 17). Just as in the geographical activist literature review of the previous chapter Horton and Kraftl highlight several problematic elements within the literature in relation to the act of activism: intentionality, and the privileging of the particular types of action i.e. the spectacular over the banal and everyday. They offer the term ‘implicit activism’ for these overlooked practices: the sometimes unintentional, subtle, more banal acts which are easily overlooked as activism:

limiting considerations of ‘resistance’ to those forms of deliberate, agentic activism which (most often as part of a social movement) explicitly address major, unequivocal contemporary societal ills. But surely...there is more to activism – and there are more kinds of activism

– than this? ...what we term ‘implicit activism’ in this paper are fostered (sometimes unintentionally) via contingent, everyday practices that often – at first glance – look little like either oppositional kinds of resistance, or deliberate, agentic activism.

(*ibid*: 17)

They therefore argue for “broadening the debate about what constitutes activism and what activism can do.” (*ibid*: 22). What this research hopefully adds to their discussion is that such implicit forms of activism can equally occur within sites typically associated with explicit forms of activism, alongside such explicit acts of activism. After all just as it is important to “seek to question the ‘boundaries’ of activism, not only between activism and academia (Maxey, 1999) but also between ‘activism’ and ‘everyday lives” (*ibid*: 15). It is important not to create new boundaries between implicit and explicit forms of activism. Highlighting implicit acts of activism without demonstrating that such acts can occur within explicit spaces of activism, as well as implicit spaces, unintentionally reinforces this divide. By keeping them in separate spheres in this way there is still a sense in which there is a separation “between ‘activism’ and ‘everyday life’”, and that action within overt activist spaces is always of the intentional and overt kind of activist act.

Exploring energy in this context offers both a way in which to expand its current under-theorised presence in this literature, and additionally an alternative to this simplistic theorising of the act of activism. It is important not to fall into the same simplistic philosophy with the concept of energy, and indeed the concept of energy can be used to counter this assumption.

The purpose here is not to dismiss the affect/emotions of activism literature entirely. This literature is important in bringing affects and emotions into discussions of activist agency, but it is too simplistic to assign them a causal role, and by not questioning broader assumptions in the activist literature such assumptions are further reproduced. Instead here affects and emotions are considered *one aspect* of the *conditions of action*, and it is not that certain emotions or affects are favourable for action as this is very much dependent on the setting and context. Potentiality then can manifest itself in feelings, as opposed to feelings causing potentiality. It is this conception of energy which I

shall explore in more depth in the following section, energy as potential for action as opposed to energy as the cause of action, through the lens of burnout.

### **Action: Action and Energy**

“There was a lot of burnout at Newbury”<sup>2</sup>

Burnout is a frequent experience of activists, and central to burnout is energy as it is often described as a depletion and exhaustion of energy, whether physical and/or emotional energy. The above quote therefore, like the Carnival of Climate Chaos experience referred to in the thesis Introduction, formed part of a significant shift in the journey of this research. It was stated by an ex-road protestor during one of my conversations with them about their activism at a festival in Wales. I was there to interview prospective residents of an eco-village, who were in the process of trying to obtain planning permission, and were at the festival to promote the project<sup>3</sup>. The activist was a friend of one of the prospective residents and I had met them by chance on the way to the festival. Following my conversations with this activist, and the phrase above in particular stuck in my head, I soon realised that ‘energy’ was central to activism more broadly and this was affirmed by the frequency with which I found myself encountering it. Additionally, when I explained to activists that my research was concerned with activist energies it seemed to strike a chord and be met with approval, it seemed obvious to them that energy was an important concern for activists. However it seems less obvious to academics, namely those of a philosophical persuasion as Caygill (2007) notes:

The association of life and energy is culturally ubiquitous, pervading breakfast cereal packages, ecological politics and a host of energy/life

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<sup>2</sup> Newbury was the site of a key road protest during the height of the road protest movement in the UK.

<sup>3</sup> My masters’ research focused on the development of this project, which struck me as an important development in climate change activism being the first eco-village or eco-community in the UK to apply for planning permission prior to being built, as well as being an attempt to bring low-impact living and building practices more into the ‘mainstream’. The project went on to obtain planning permission and became one of my three case studies as I shall discuss in the following chapter on Methodology.

enhancing products and programmes. The nexus of life and energy is moreover axiomatic for contemporary research in biology and the neurosciences which are developing extremely sophisticated accounts of life and consciousness in terms of energy transfers, conservation and degradation. Yet in spite of the centrality of energy to the contemporary cultural and scientific *doxa*, the concept itself remains strangely unanalysed in contemporary philosophy and theory. Here, work continues to be pursued in terms of such archaic concepts as force and power. While such concepts may serve to introduce a dynamic element into contemporary theory – evident in such theoretical couplings as ‘corporeal force’ or ‘bio-power’ – they are historically anachronistic and conceptually limited in comparison with the concept of energy. Philosophy, however, very rarely reflects directly on the concept of energy, let alone the nexus between the concepts of energy and life. One of the exceptions to the philosophical oblivion of energy is the series of works produced by Alfred North Whitehead (*ibid*: 19, emphasis original)

As Caygill notes, apart from the Whitehead’s work (1920; 1929; 1933; 1934), energy has remained largely absent from philosophical reflection, and Whitehead’s work arguably relies on “parallels and analogies between the expressions of energy in physical nature, life and consciousness” and as such is a “testimony” to “the difficulty of framing a unified philosophy of energy.” (*ibid*: 20). The general absence of energy from philosophical work, including philosophically inclined geographical research, can perhaps be explained by this very “culturally ambiguous” nature and the scientific associations of the term to which Caygill above refers. So that, like Whitehead, we often find ourselves slipping into scientific analogies and parallels. For example, in an everyday context we often talk of running out of energy and recharging our batteries as if our energetic experiences operate in the same as electrical energy. Scientific understandings of energy have quickly slipped into its everyday use, but as a word it predates its more modern associations with physics (Brown, 1999) as is evident from how often it crops up in classic literature (e.g. Bronte, 2003 [1847]). Because then energy is culturally ambiguous and part of our everyday vocabulary, used in a variety of ways to describe our experiences, feelings,

perceptions, we tend to not take energy seriously in an academic context. It is therefore easy to dismiss energy as merely a word, used interchangeably with other similar words, or as simply a metaphor. However, its frequency within activism theory and practice, does I believe indicate that it is more-than a word or metaphor. As Lefebvre stated in the introductory chapter to this thesis we “know that such links exist” (1991: 12), that is between the word energy and our material life-worlds, and that the word energy helps us to articulate something of our lived experience.

Burnout is then one element of lived experience which energy is used to help articulate. The state of burnout referred to above is assumed to lead to or highlight that the potential for action is lost. But, alternatively burnout could be seen as embodying a particular form of potential, namely impotentiality, as arguably in a state of burnout the potential for activism action, and therefore energy, is not lost but simply reserved and not used. For Agamben, this impotentiality “constitutes the essence of potentiality” (*ibid*: 182, emphasis original). This is not to imply that these feelings are somehow less real or authentic, these feelings no doubt occur, simply then that there is surely more to ‘burnout’ and therefore activist energy dynamics than this, more-than a simple absence or presence, or a loss and gain of energy.

For Agamben there are two forms of potentiality: firstly potentiality which requires knowledge or ability; this potentiality is referred to as “*existing potentiality*”: “In this sense, we say of the architect that he or she has the *potential* to build, of the poet that he or she has the *potential* to write poems” (Agamben, 1999: 179, emphasis original). This type of potentiality equally contains an impotentiality, the architect while possessing the ability and knowledge to build something also has the potential *not* to build something. The presence of a particular knowledge or ability does not makes its use and actualisation always certain. So we could say that an activist, even a ‘burnt out’ activist, possess this form of potentiality through the activist experience, training or skills they possess. By possessing these skills an activist, even one who is not ‘burnt out’, always possess the potential to not act as well as to act. The second form of potentiality Agamben identifies is “*generic potentiality*”: “this is the one that is meant when we say, for example, that a child has the potential to know, or that he or she can potentially become the head of State.” (*ibid*). Again, equally,

the child has the potential to *not* become the Head of State, therefore in both forms of potentiality impotentiality is a central element of its very potential. Similarly, we could say that a ‘non-activists’ possess this generic potentiality to be an activist and to perform activism, or to not be an activist and not perform activism.

The potential or capacity to act therefore always contains within it simultaneously the potential to *not* act, that is, impotentiality. Precisely because of the uncertain nature of capacity, the presence of a capacity does not guarantee action, and the form of outcome or effect this capacity will translate into once actualised is always profoundly uncertain and unknowable. We see this in activism all the time with unexpected and unintended outcomes quite different, whether better or worse, to those intended. An act of activism is too easily labelled a ‘failure’ if it does not immediately achieve its desired aim and objectives, yet it can have outcomes different to but far beyond those imagined and intended. Especially as burnout often coincides with frustrations and disappointments over particular forms of action, it therefore indicates the presence of activist potential but simply without a particular outlet as yet. Burnout can then be understood not as an absence or depletion of energy and therefore the capacity for action, but rather an explicit state of impotentiality.

Similarly, burnout is too easily deemed a failure, whether of an individual activist or a whole group or movement, when it is often simply a ceasing of a particular form of activism, rather than an entire ‘dropping out’ and halting of activist inclinations. In the context of this research I met several ex-road protestors, in addition to the activists whose quote began this section, who became frustrated with the movement and this frustration led them into other forms of activism, namely low-impact living and community activism. In these cases energy or potential is redirected rather than lost, or can be stored in other forms and re-actualised at another time. In everyday understandings of energy it is often assumed that energy is transformed into action and therefore somehow dissolves once action occurs. Agamben, offers an alternative perspective to this assumption in relation to potentiality, he writes:

Contrary to the traditional idea of potentiality that is annulled in actuality, here we are confronted with a potentiality that conserves itself and saves

itself in actuality. Here potentiality, so to speak, survives actuality and, in this way, *gives itself to itself*. (Agamben, 1999: 184, emphasis original).

If we were to apply this to energy it contradicts typical assumptions: that it can be depleted completely, or even used up by and during actions. It is instead possible to consider energy as inexhaustible, and rather than being lost or used up in actuality it is conserved in actuality, and such actuality can equally include ‘things’ as well as actions. So rather than a complete loss of potentiality we see cycles of potentiality and impotentiality. In this case perceptions of capacity, such as depletion or enhancement of energy, can be considered mechanisms for energy preservation. A perceived decrease in energy may point to a disconnection from the knowing of energy rather than a literal disappearing or depletion. Energy therefore in this situation becomes unknowable and undetectable, protected or shielded perhaps, rather than non-existent.

Where burnout is assumed to be a loss of potential for action this privileges a particular form of action, usually direct action (such as in this case of the road protest movement), and suggests that if this form of action is no longer being performed then activist energy is lost. But burnout in many activists I encountered was a disillusionment with a very particular form of action (often direct action), rather than a complete abandonment of activist action. Arguably without this experience of burnout the new directions of these activists would not have occurred, therefore burnout can be a state of potential for new forms of activism. This also assumes that the act of activist pausing, evaluation, and reflection, is not an act of activism, that acts of activism can only be physical bodily acts. In other words, just because a particular act is not occurring does not mean to say that the potential for action is lost altogether. Potentiality in this understanding is never fully ‘lost’ and often emerges in unlikely, fleeting moments and acts easily overlooked. For example, a brief encounter between ‘a member of the public’ and an ‘activist’ at a campaign stall can inspire a new line of action or spark a new way of thinking. This potentiality can be potential for other forms of action, beyond what we might typically class as ‘activism’.

There are additionally particular outcomes assumed to count in this typical framing of burnout as a halting of activist action. Burnout is often associated with ‘failures’, when activist goals are not immediately achieved. The

overemphasis is often on tangible outcomes rather than contributing to a continuous activist sense of potentiality, a sense of something not-yet, something which could be, which is I would argue far more important. Therefore perhaps seeing burnout differently, and the potentiality inherent in burnout, can be more productive for activism.

Opposite states to burnout, such as feeling energetic and enthusiastic for action, are associated with the certainty of action just as burnout is assumed to imply the certainty of in-action. This assumes that the presence of such states means action is inevitable, but the apparent presence of ‘energy’, just as an apparent lack of energy, has an impotentiality aspect. The presence of ‘energy’ does not make its ‘use’ inevitable or more probable. Therefore I do not wish to propose energy as a ‘thing’ which propels action, but rather the potential for action manifest as the varying presence of the conditions for action. This understanding is similar to what Francois Jullien (1995) terms the ‘propensity of things’ (*shi*), who writes on the emergence of “potential born of disposition” in ancient Chinese military strategy:

from a strategic perspective, what is included in the “disposition” that generates potential? For one cannot interpret it simply, as in the comparison above, in relation to the configuration or the lay of the land – even if the terrain of operations is certainly one determining factor, since a general must make the most of the character of the land, distant or close, low-lying or elevated, accessible or difficult to reach, open or closed in, as the case may be. But equally important is the moral disposition of the protagonists, whether they are enthusiastic or dispirited, and all the other “circumstantial” factors also count – whether the climate is favourable or unfavourable, whether the troops are well organised or scattered, in good shape or exhausted. Whatever the factors involved, the situation can, and must, exert its coercive effect in two ways: positively, by encouraging the troops to invest all their energy in the offensive, and negatively, by sapping the enemy troops of all initiative and reducing them to passivity. Because of *shi*, they will not be in a position to resist, no matter how numerous. Mere numerical advantage gives way before these superior, more decisive conditions. (Jullien, 1995: 28)

Jullien's above example demonstrates the conditions or potential for action as an aligning of multiple elements, it is then a process rather than thing, a process of alignment. So rather than conceiving of energy in this context as *one singular thing* it is rather a complex *tangled web of things*, these might include: bodily chemicals and reactions, the conscious and unconscious, feelings, moods, emotions, affects, connections, disconnections, relations, to name just a few. Energy as the presence of these things, these conditions for action, which may come together or align favourably to encourage action, or unfavourably and create conditions which discourage action, to varying degrees. But, importantly, the conditions for action do not cause action or make action definite or more likely, they simply provide the conditions for potentiality (and impotentiality).

The conditions for action in this context refer to inclinations and dispositions for actions rather than physical capacity. Though physical capacity can play a role, I would argue that subjects do not necessarily *know* the physical capacity present as if it is a tangible quantifiable thing which can be read and detected. The interest here is in potentiality rather than the possibility for action, potentiality in this context exceeds the logic of the possibilities for action. This is one of the key differences between possibility and potentiality, in the understanding being used here: that potentialities exceed the logic of possibilities. Possibilities are limited to that which is logically possible, whereas potentialities are not necessarily bound within the means of what acts can logically occur as such logic is restricted by that which has gone before. Additionally a potentiality can be said to have a form of existence, unlike possibilities which can be merely theoretical, but this form of existence is unlike that which we normally consider within the realms of existence, as Heller Roazen, Agamben's translator and editor, outlines in his introduction to Agamben's work:

Unlike mere possibilities, which can be considered from a purely logical standpoint, potentialities or capacities present themselves above all as things that exist but that, at the same time, do not exist as actual things: they are present, yet they do not appear in the form of present things. What is at issue in the concept of potentiality is nothing less than a mode of existence that is irreducible to actuality. (Heller-Roazen, 1999: 14)

Arguably all the elements which compose the conditions for action have a tangible presence in some form, but it is the potentiality they collectively form, much like potentiality more broadly, which is not quite graspable and “irreducible to actuality”. If energy understood as the conditions action has a presence, but a not quite tangible one which is not reducible to actuality, this is reminiscent of Brown’s ‘everyday’ understanding of energy as an “invisible force”. Therefore, arguably everyday understandings of energy are not simply ‘wrong’, after all they do take hold or root in our vocabulary for a reason, but rather too simplistic. Rather than energy causing action and the presence of ‘energy’ denoting the certainty of action, instead I wish to offer a conception of energy which refers to a potential for action rather a certainty of action, where action hangs in the air as a possibility. It is then about an openness to action rather than a certainty of action, as it is this openness which encourages potentiality.

### **Relations: Affect and Energy**

“There was a lot of burnout at Newbury”

If we see energy in terms of potentiality rather than causality then this allows us to see energetic feelings differently. Therefore, in addition to providing a window for particular assumptions around potentiality, burnout can be used to read the assumptions of energetic feelings. Burnout is after all partly a feeling, and one which is often associated with particular feelings, such as disappointment, disillusionment, hopelessness, and depression. These feelings, according to Collins (2004), are associated with the lower spectrum of energy dimensions i.e. low energy. Where feelings are assumed have particular energetic dimensions the assumption often follows that these feelings *cause* these energetic or motivational levels, and thus cause action or inaction. Therefore an activist feels burnt out and stops doing activism *because* they have these feelings, but we could say instead that these feelings are indicators rather than linear causes. For example, that they indicate, on one level, particular relations: relations to the action occurring, to the spatial elements and other activists. And that in turn these

relations indicate a particular openness (or lack of) to action, and thus the potential for action. Feelings here are one aspect of the conditions for action, and can indicate certain relations to other conditions. Relations are therefore the broader aspect through which I will now turn. There are two relations I wish to explore here, the relationship between energy and feelings, in particular energy and affect, and relations in terms of the contagion of energy. Energetic feelings, much like affects and emotions, are assumed to be contagious and contagious through similar mechanisms. If we view the above statement through the lens of activist relations then we might read the fact that there was a “lot of burnout”, at this particular activist space, as partly a result of the contagion of this feeling.

The implicit presence of energy in the literature on the emotions and affects of activism, explored at the beginning of this chapter, is part of much broader energetic assumptions around emotion and affect. In particular, emotions and affects are assumed to have energetic dimensions, and these dimensions are generally seen as only that: as dimensions of feelings rather than feelings in themselves. For example Brennan (2004) writes that: “a point that needs to be stressed at the onset is that affects have an energetic dimension. This is why they can enhance or deplete.” (6). While in the geographic literature Anderson (2004) refers to energetic ‘enhancements’ and ‘depletions’ in the context of hope and boredom, these ‘dynamic shifts’ are therefore considered aspects of these categorical affects rather than feelings in themselves, he writes of “boredoms diverse energies” (*ibid*: 752) and that via boredom: “occasionally ‘life’ is dead, dulled or depleted” (*ibid*: 749). Yet, burnout is often considered first and foremost an energetic state, namely a low energy state, which other feelings cause or contribute to it. Brown and Pickerill (2009), for example, define burnout as: “a state of mental and physical exhaustion brought on by over-work or trauma” (2009: 28). Arguably it is possible to feel burnt out without particular accompanying emotions or affects: to just feel burnt out. Burnout can then be a state in itself, therefore one might assume that other energetic forms of feeling can be experienced by themselves. This is the argument of Stern (1985), he demonstrates that affects are generally understood as experienced along two ‘dimensions’, one of which is ‘activation’ or the energetic dimensions of a feeling:

Usually one thinks of affective experience in terms of discrete categories of affect – happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, surprise, interest, and perhaps shame, and their combinations...Each discrete category of affect is also generally thought to be experienced along at least two commonly agreed upon dimensions: activation and hedonic tone. Activation refers to the amount of intensity or urgency of the feeling quality, while hedonic tone refers to degree to which the feeling quality is pleasurable or unpleasurable.

(Stern, 1985: 54-55)

Often then energy refers to the activation level of a categorical affect: its ‘intensity’ or ‘urgency’. Therefore, our existing language of affect often overlooks and ‘subsumes’ energetic feelings within broader forms of feeling, but as Stern contends arguably such forms of feeling, including burnout, “cannot be adequately explained by the concept of level of activation”:

In most accounts of affects and their dimensions, what are here called vitality affects might be subsumed under the all-purpose, unswerving dimension of level of activation or arousal. Activation and arousal certainly occur, but they are not experienced simply as feelings somewhere along, or at some point on, this dimension. (*ibid*: 57).

Stern then argues for the need for a distinction, and offers the term ‘vitality affects’ through which to distinguish energetic forms of feeling:

why is it necessary to add a new term for certain forms of human experience? It is necessary because many qualities of feeling that occur do not fit into our existing lexicon or taxonomy of affects. These elusive qualities are better captured by dynamic kinetic terms such as “surging,” “fading away,” “fleeting,” “explosive,” “crescendo,” “decrescendo,” “bursting,” “drawn out,” and so on...It is these feelings that will be *elicited* by changes in motivational states, appetites, and tensions. (Stern, 1985: 54)

Such feelings are clearly important, especially, as Stern writes above, as such feelings can: “be elicited by changes in motivational states” and therefore changes in feelings of potential for action. However, there are two potential problems posed by the concept of vitality affects<sup>4</sup>: firstly that they can lead to a simplistic cause and effect model of action, secondly they encourage energetic feelings to be considered on a spectrum from high to low, enhanced to depleted. While these dynamics shifts are certainly overlooked and under-theorised compared to the categorical affects Stern contrasts them to, it is important not to fall into the same simplistic cause and effect trap often associated with the categorical affects, i.e. that affects such as anger cause action. For example, it is easy to consider the crescendo, explosive, surging feelings as causing action rather than simply signalling a shift in the conditions and thus potential for action. And conversely, that the feelings of decrescendo and fading away cause the halting of action. Instead I would argue, that these feelings signal particular relations. For example, they may signal an openness and alignment to a particular space, practice, group, or event, where feelings of acceleration occur. Conversely feelings of deceleration may signal a misalignment or closed state to the present elements and aspects. From this perspective potentiality is never absent or lesser but rather closed off, blocked, or redirected. Therefore such kinetic feelings can be considered to signal shifts in potentiality, namely a shift in openness or alignment to particular forms of action, rather than a certainty of action.

The difference in my own understanding is that what Stern refers to as energetic feeling, through his term vitality affects, I consider as one element among many which compose the conditions for action, and that such feelings can signal a process of aligning (or mis-aligning) with various elements in order to create the conditions for action (or in-action). I agree with Stern that energetic forms of feeling are overlooked, and too often subsumed in other forms of feeling, when they can clearly occur independently. However I wish to depart from the considering of energy in relation to feeling as a single ‘thing’ and instead consider energetic feelings as bundles of feelings or affects, among other elements. While it is important to separate these dynamic feelings to some extent it is also important not to separate them too much from other forms of feeling as

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<sup>4</sup> Although that is not to say that this is Stern’s intention, but rather it concerns ingrained understandings around energy which are easily reproduced.

all collectively, and in their different combinations, can play a role in the potential for action. Especially as such kinetic feelings can occur with other forms of feeling, as well as independently: “vitality affects occur both in the presence of and in the absence of categorical affects.” (Stern, 1985: 55).

This understanding of the relationship between action and energetic feelings, as signals or indicators of particular relations rather than direct causes, draws on the affect literature more broadly, as it is from here that this research began, being initially concerned with the affects of activism. Within this literature, especially within the geographical affect literature, I frequently encountered the phrase energy or energies. In particular, definitions of affect often exude energetic connotations, and ‘energies’ in particular occurs frequently in these definitions, as the two extracts below demonstrate:

affects are: properties, competencies, modalities, *energies*, attunements, arrangements and intensities of differing texture, temporality, velocity and spatiality, that act on bodies, are produced through bodies and transmitted by bodies. (Lorimer, 2008: 552, my emphasis)

Affect is... the “property of the active outcome of an encounter” (Thrift, 2004a: 62), which permits and restricts the always – emergent materiality, dynamism and co-production of agents, spaces and atmospheres. These may be feelings, *energies*, moods or tensions; but crucially, they are co-relational with and as the production of space (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002). (Kraftl and Horton, 2007: 1016, my emphasis)

Alongside, ‘energies’ I frequently encountered the term ‘affective energies’ both within the broader affect literature (e.g. Bennett, 2004) and the geographical literature in particular. For example, drawing on Thrift’s use of the phrase, Holloway writes that spiritual spaces: “‘quiver with affective energy’ and that simultaneously these ‘energies’ of space are worthy of investigation in their own right (Thrift, 2004a: 57)” (Holloway, 2006: 182). While Crang and Tolia-Kelly refer to the ‘affective energies’ of heritage spaces as generated by the interactions and relationships between space/place, the body, and the “heritage apparatus”:

we highlight the differentiated affective energies created by relationships between geography (site, situation, and spaces), places (how they are encountered, experienced, and felt), the body (race, citizenship, and positioning), and the ‘heritage’ apparatus (exhibits, taxonomies, and conservation). (Crang and Tolia-Kelly, 2010: 2316)

In neither case, of ‘energies’ or ‘affective energies’, is it made clear why ‘energies’ is chosen, or why affects can be considered ‘energies’. Therefore another aim in this research, in addition to countering particular activist literature assumptions, is to bring into focus a previously sidelined and taken-for-granted term in the geographical affect literature. There are I would argue three reasons for energy’s explicit presence in the affect literature, reasons which can occur simultaneously: firstly the cultural ambiguous nature of energy and the way in which it is a part of the everyday vocabulary, secondly the assumption that emotions or affects can have energetic dimensions, and thirdly a particular reading of affect as capacities within which energy as a word naturally becomes a way to reflect this. One could assume that this final reason is the main reason for energy’s frequent use: a particular understanding or reading of affect where it is understood as increases or decreases in a body’s capacities for action. Thrift (2004a) highlights this understanding of affect as one of four dominant ‘translations’ of affect, and defines this understanding in more depth in the following passage:

So affect, defined as the property of the active outcome of an encounter, takes the form of an increase or decrease in the ability of the body and mind alike to act, which can be positive – and thus increase that ability (counting as ‘joyful’ or euphoric) – or negative – and thus diminish that ability (counting as ‘sorrowful’ or dysphoric). Spinoza therefore detaches ‘the emotions’ from the realm of responses and situations and attaches them instead to action and encounters as the affections of substance or of its attributes and as *greater or lesser forces of existing*.

(Thrift, 2004a: 62, emphasis original)

From this understanding of affect there are several useful elements which can be applied in relation to a theorising of energy. To begin with, the key point which can be drawn from the above is that ‘encounters’ can increase or decrease a body’s *ability* to act, or in other words a body’s *potential* to act. Action does not necessarily occur and is not necessarily actualised as a result of an encounter, it is simply that the conditions for action are activated or aligned. On one hand this suggests an activating of a capacity or ability to do something, but it can equally be an activating of awareness of capacity, in either case the body is now able when it was not or did not realise it was before. It also suggests a willingness and desire which is awakened or initiated, though this need not be a conscious will or desire. As the passage above signals, and as Thrift himself explains, this particular translation of affect as shifts in capacities draws on the work of Spinoza and more specifically Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza. In *Spinoza: a practical philosophy* Deleuze defines affect thus: “the capacity for being affected is manifested as a *power of acting* insofar as it is assumed to be filled by active affections, but as a *power of being acted upon* insofar as it is filled by passions.” (Deleuze, 1988: 27, emphasis original). While the ‘power of acting’ element suggests a shift in capacities to act, ‘the power of being acted’ upon suggests shifts in openness to other bodies and their influence, in this reading therefore affects can be argued as ultimately about both an openness to the surrounding space and bodies and an openness to action itself.

Openness is therefore central in this understanding, especially as it could be argued, within reasonable limits<sup>5</sup>, that a body always has the ability or capacity for action/actualisation, capacity and ability in the sense is often a matter of perception. Therefore burnout is a perceived absence or depletion of capacity, and ultimately a closed state of relations to a particular form of acting. Again this is not to downgrade or devalue the experience of burnout, but simply to use burnout to reveal certain assumptions about the act of activism and the potential for such acts.

In this context affect is understood not as a property of a body: “[affect] does not reside in a subject, body or sign as if it were an object possessed by a

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<sup>5</sup> Since the focus here is not on bodies that are disadvantaged in some respect, the bodies concerned here are able bodies. There are of course exceptions; severely physically exhausted or emotionally exhausted bodies.

subject” (Anderson, 2006: 735), but instead as a property of a relation: “affect can be understood as the property of relations, of interactions, of events: it is not purely the property of a single (human) being” (Kraftl and Adey, 2008: 215). Similarly therefore if energy is understood as involving conditions for action, and affect as one manifestation of these conditions and one which can indicate particular relations to other conditions, then it follows that energy in this understanding is ultimately about relations rather than individual subjects. If relations are central then some of the mechanisms of these relations are the elements to which I will now turn, again drawing inspiration from the affect literature. Mechanisms in this context are understood as how different elements align to create the conditions and possibility for action.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, we could partly read the fact that there was a “lot of burnout at Newbury” as partly a result of a contagion of this feeling, as well other conditions such as the stresses of the situation. As another ex-road protestor stated in an interview “certainly in the road protest times there was, the burnout was a common phrase” (Appendix J). Energetic feelings, much like affects and emotions, are assumed to be contagious and contagious through similar mechanisms. This idea of energy is ingrained in our everyday understanding of energy, for example becoming energised by another’s apparent abundance of energy or drained by another’s lack of energy: “The affectivities of different types of relation can be witnessed in the qualitative differences that energetically enhance or deplete the living of space-times. In spaces of sexual and romantic love, for example, ‘you become energised when you are with some loves or some friends. With others you are bored or drained, tired or depressed.’” (Brennan, 2004: 6 cited in Anderson, 2006a: 735). Brennan’s example, which Anderson draws on, suggests that it is the nature of the relation rather than the person themselves, a property then of the relation rather than of an individual, which ‘energises’ or ‘drains’.

While contagion suggests a literal catching of energetic feelings, much like one would catch a virus, Brennan writes that in the case of affective contagion the feelings themselves are not literally caught but rather subjects become ‘aligned’: “The form of transmission whereby people become alike is a process whereby one person’s or one group’s nervous and hormonal systems are brought into alignment with another’s. Neurologists call this process

“entrainment,” either chemical entrainment or electrical entrainment” (Brennan, 2004: 9). In addition to alignment, one could think of this process in terms of the ‘compositions’ and ‘decompositions’ in Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza:

When a body “encounters” another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts...as conscious beings, we never apprehend anything but the *effects* of these compositions and decompositions: we experience *joy* when a body encounters ours and enters into composition with it, and *sadness* when, on the contrary, a body or an idea threaten our own coherence. We are in a condition such that we only take in “what happens” to our body, “what happens” to our mind, that is, the effect of a body on our body, the effect of an idea on our idea.

(Deleuze, 1988: 19, emphasis original)

Here Deleuze argues that it is only the outcome of an alignment or misalignment which can be detected, only its ‘effects’, rather than the alignment itself. A ‘positive’ outcome then, such as an activation of or openness to the condition for (a particular) action, suggests a positive alignment or composition of bodies. In Deleuze’s discussion a ‘body’ need not refer to a human body, and can include ‘things’, spaces, or in other words the more-than-human. Although it is important to note that where this idea of alignment or composition, rather than a literal contagion, is applied to energetic feelings this does not mean that the same thing is being felt and experienced by all present. As Ahmed notes in relation to affective contagion: “To be affected by another does not mean being affected in the same way as another, or that an affect is simply transmitted, creating a shared feeling or atmosphere.” (Ahmed, 2008: 11), and this observation can, of course, be applied to energetic feelings just as to affects. When these feelings are labelled and named it is often assumed that the same thing is being felt and experienced. Burnout is one example of this, “there was a lot burnout” assumes that each activist is experiencing the same thing. Equally, just because burnout was a ‘common phrase’ of the road protest movement does not mean that it was literally a common feeling.

Part of the reason why a subject will always be affected differently is because they enter the encounter from a particular and unique *affective angle*. As Brennan (2004) notes, on the transmission of affect: “If I feel anxiety when I enter the room, then that will influence what I perceive or receive by way of an ‘impression’” (*ibid*: 6). Ahmed builds on this statement by Brennan, arguing that bodies never arrive “neutral”:

If bodies do not arrive neutral, if we are always in some way or another moody, then what we will receive as an impression will depend on our affective situation...So we may walk into the room and “feel the atmosphere,” but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we might say that the atmosphere is already *angled*; it is always felt from a specific point...Having read the atmosphere, one can become tense, which in turn affects what happens, how things move along. The moods we arrive with do affect what happens: which is not to say we always keep our moods. Sometimes I arrive heavy with anxiety, and everything that happens makes me feel more anxious, while at other times, *things happen* that ease the anxiety, make the space itself seem light and energetic. (Ahmed, 2010: 36-37, my emphasis)

Rather than catching or transmitting energy, which implies it as a tangible thing, energy is encountered and reacted to, as this is ultimately what is being talked about here in the sense of energy contagion: encounters and reactions. As each element or subject is different, and equally each encounter, there is no reason to assume that each reaction will be the same. Whereas in the causal role of affects and emotions suggested by the activist literature, hope, anger etc causes action as if all subjects react in the same way and all feelings cause the same reaction. Therefore, we can understand energetic contagion as “a *process* that one” can become “‘caught up’ in” rather than a thing which is caught and passed on in a uniform way:

affective transmission is never simply something one ‘catches’ but rather a process that one is ‘caught up’ in. Its complexity is revealed through the

linkages and connections of the body to other practices, techniques, bodies (human and non-human), energies, judgements, inscriptions and so forth that are relationally embodied.

(Blackman, 2007: 30, my emphasis)

The human mechanisms of this process of energetic contagion, or rather energetic alignment, can be assumed to be similar to those of affect more broadly, involving all the senses; smell, touch, sound, sight, along with bodily movements and gestures, and facial expressions (Blackman, 2007; Brennan, 2004; Thrift, 2008). But additionally more-than-human elements must play a role, including spatial elements whether objects, things, aspects of the landscape, or other living entities. All must clearly play a role in the contagion, transmission, projection, 'introjection' (Brennan, 2004), flow and circulation of energetic feelings, since they compose 'space' and cannot be separated out from one another. This runs counter to Stern who identifies "vitality affects" as that which "distinguishes animate from inanimate": "we identified vitality affects as those dynamic, kinetic qualities of feeling that distinguish animate from inanimate and that correspond to the momentary changes in feeling states involved in the organic processes of being alive." (Stern, 1985: 156). This mirrors the habits of thinking identified by Bennett (2010) in the previous chapter: "This habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)" (ibid: *vii*).

One way in which to understand this process and aligning of various human and non-human elements is through the concept of 'atmospheres'. On first glance atmosphere, like energy, appears to be essentially a metaphor for thinking about the contagion, but, as argued by Brennan, atmospheres like energy are more-than merely metaphors, they are very much present and sense-able entities:

The transmission of affect, whether grief, anxiety, or anger, is social and psychological in origin. But the transmission is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief changes, some longer lasting. In other words, the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The "atmosphere" or the environment literally gets into the individual. Physically and biologically,

*something is present that was not there before*, but it did not originate *sui generis*: it was not generated solely or sometimes even in part by the individual organism or its genes.

(Brennan, 2004: 1, my emphasis)

Although it is important not to fall back into old ‘habits’ of thinking and consider an atmosphere a singular thing, but rather considered it a process of encounter and relation as in Brennan’s extract above suggests. This understanding suggests that atmosphere inhabits the spaces in-between.

A particular theorising of atmosphere I wish to draw on is Anderson (2009), who refers to affective atmospheres as an affective “excess” or a “more”. In relation to energy it could be described as an excess, abundance, or an overflowing of potential in a particular space. An atmosphere here could mean that subjects and objects are immersed or saturated by a particular energy or energies (understood as a potential for action) as opposed to a mere hint, or “whiff” as Brennan (2004) would say, of an affective energy. This excess is of course not always good, and while atmospheres can be an excess of certain feelings they can also be an excessive absence.

Rather than a singular united and shared feeling, here atmospheres are understood as composed of multiple micro-atmospheres. Just as in the case of the micro-acts of the thesis introduction, this micro label is not to imply them as lesser or less productive. These micro atmospheres can be considered to inhabit the space surrounding an individual subject or object, much like the affective angles highlighted by Ahmed and Brennan, which sometimes connect up and align with other atmospheres. It therefore might be said that atmospheres always consist of micro and macro atmospheres which compliment or conflict with each other. Therefore we can think of atmospheres not as coherent wholes or masses but rather as collections of micro-atmospheres, where each micro-atmosphere consists of the energetic baggage of each element or micro-group of elements. For example a protest march is often considered to form a single atmosphere but within a single march there will be clusters or groups of element each arriving with their own moods and dispositions: a group of friends who have made their own banner and have to take it turns to hold it up, a cyclist powering a speaker towing behind them and weaving through the crowd with their music, a samba

band playing their instruments as they march while people around them dance, or a couple with their children with one child on their mother's back and another dancing around her pram<sup>6</sup>. It is then perhaps more accurate to think of atmospheres as complex patchworks or jigsaws made up of numerous conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, human and more-than-human elements etc, which connect, disconnect and overlap. For subjects or object do not enter into an atmosphere blank or pure, they come with baggage, as Brennan writes:

transmission does not mean that a person's particular emotional experience is irrelevant. We may influence the registration of the transmitted affect in a variety of ways; affects are not received or registered in a vacuum. If I feel anxiety when I enter the room, then that will influence what I perceive or receive by way of an impression (a word that means what it says). On the other hand, if I am not aware that there are affects in the air, I may hold myself solely responsible for them and, in this case, ferret around for an explanation in my recent personal history. (Brennan, 2004: 6)

But equally as Brennan indicates in the last sentence too much weight should not be given to such baggage and its influence and not enough to the atmosphere itself. Additionally, these angles or this baggage, with which elements enter into encounters and relations, *does not mean* that they are always weighed down by them and that atmospheres are always outweighed by their influence. They are part of the conditions for action, but one element among many of these conditions, and not necessarily a more important or more influential element, as this is always context and subject/object dependent.

### **Space: Energy and Space**

“There was a lot of burnout at Newbury”

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<sup>6</sup> All of these refer to examples from the fieldwork: from the Camp for Climate Action direct action ‘The Climate Swoop’ at Ratcliffe-on-Soar coal fired power station just outside Nottingham.

Another aspect of energy relations hinted at in the above statement is that of relations to space or rather aspect considered to compose 'space': "there was a lot of burnout *at Newbury*". Burnout is often assumed to be a property, namely a property of activist themselves, and this in turn implies energy as a property: as something which you can be with or without. Yet arguably in the above statement burnout is not a property of the activists themselves, it is not owned by and residing in them, it is an aspect of the setting and an aspect of a relation to it. Space therefore, in energy dynamics, is the theme to which I will now turn. Space often implies, and inclines us to think of it as a coherent and unified background or stage for action. Instead I shall use the word space as an encompassing word to refer to the multitude of elements which are considered to compose space, namely the non or more-than-human elements. This does not extend only to physical or material elements, but equally includes virtual presences and lingerings (such as atmospheres and future visions), as well as the clutter of activist spaces.

This understanding of energy, as involving and including the more-than-human, contrast to the prominent energy literature of Collins' (1990, 2004) on 'emotional energy'. In this work Collins considered energy dynamics as a purely social and human process. This of course mirrors the assumptions of the emotion and affects of activism literature, as well as much of the affect and emotion literature including Stern (1985). Although Collins' theory of social 'attunement' allowing energy 'contagion', to some degree echoes alignment, and is useful in that it can be thought of here in a broader sense. However, where energy is considered a purely human property or thing then this is often accompanied by additional assumptions: that there is a fixed capacity of energy within each subject which can be enhanced and depleted, and further that there is a spectrum of energy from high to low. These states, which can be simply plotted along a spectrum are implied to relate to a quantifiable capacity, and are assumed to be accurately displayed in the acts and behaviour of a subject. So for example, there are particular feelings which are believed to always correspond to a state of high energy or low energy, as Brown below observes, these feelings are therefore considered expressions or manifestations of high or low energy:

There are many words expressing a high-energy state: vitality, vigour, vivacity, strength, arousal, ardour, drive, fervour, stamina, gumption, zeal and zest. Just as many words describe the opposite: lethargy, apathy, timidity, weakness, languor, weariness, tiredness, fatigue, and depression. These words cover many shades of meaning, but what they have in common is the idea of a capacity or desire to do things, beyond the technical skill to perform the particular task. (Brown, 1999: 4)

As Brown demonstrates, high energy is believed to involve enthusiasm and excitement, and to entail a certain intensity. While low energy on the other hand seems to imply almost a wilting, a disappearing or hiding of the subject, a fading into the background. Our energy level in this view then becomes something that we fully know (though not necessarily consciously), embody, display, and perform. If a subject is behaving in a way which suggests high energy, such as being enthusiastic, excitable, or highly mobile, then this is assumed to translate to high amounts of energy being present. These states and shifts in feeling are then assumed to accurately reflect the capacity present. Regenerated energy states then imply a renewed energy for action, similarly a feeling of high energy is implied as a high capacity or potential for action. While depletions of energy, or states of low energy, are suggested as correlating to a low or reduced capacity. The concept of high and low states of energy assumes that the apparent presence of a higher energy feeling makes action more likely. Equally it implies that state of low or absent energy means that action is unlikely or even impossible. But I would argue that energy, when considered in terms of potentiality, can be present without being used, it has both a potentiality and an impotentiality dimension. For example, in the case of burnout, action is not impossible but merely suspended or taking another form, such as a more reflective form. Equally something can occur which can suddenly move burnt out bodies in or out of the field of action, therefore burnt out bodies can be constantly on the cusp of action. Additionally there may be occasions when a burnt out body acts but less easily and less willingly than it would usually. Collins' work above then proposes a too simplistic causal relationship between action and high or low energy states.

Collin's work around high and low energy, and the regeneration and depletion of energy, show that it is too easily assumed that the energy felt and experienced operates in the same way as physical and mechanical forms of energy are understood e.g. that 'human energies' operate in the same way as electrical energy. Additionally, it is assumed that whenever energy is mentioned, in a variety of contrasting contexts, it always refers to the same thing and same experience. But as Ahmed's (2010) and Brennan's (2004) observations above of affective angles and baggage show because of the uniqueness of each encounter, subject, and their angle or baggage this is arguably never possible. Additionally when individuals refer to the energy they feel and experience it is assumed that they too are always referring to the same thing each time. This view of energy therefore suggests a universal experience of energy states.

High energy and regenerated energy are typically associated with positive affects, moods and emotions, similarly low energy and drained or depleted energy are associated with negative moods, feelings and affects e.g. depression. For Collins this relationship only has any really effect when the negative or positive feelings are part of long term mood:

EE [Emotional Energy] gives energy, not just for physical activity (such as demonstrative outbursts at moments of acute joy), but above all for taking the initiative in social interaction, putting enthusiasm into it, taking the lead in setting the level of emotional entrainment. Similarly, sadness or depression is a motivational force when it is a long-term mood, reducing the level of activity, not only bringing physical listlessness (at its extreme, the avoidance of being awake), but making social interaction passive, foot-dragging, perfunctory.

(Collins, 2004: 107)

Collins' spectrum of energy therefore sets up a simplistic association between high energy and positive affects, and low energy and negative affects. Yet the work of Thayer (1996) demonstrates that feelings of high energy can be associated with 'negative' affects e.g. anger, and feelings of low energy with more 'positive' affects e.g. calm contentment. Therefore the association made

between positive states and high energy, and negative states and low energy is too simplifying.

Therefore in summary, I am critical of Collins spectrum of energy for several reasons. Firstly, Collins work suggests energy as a quantifiable thing which can be lost, gained, and stored, and in turn that there is a fixed capacity for energy storage with a fixed upper and lower limit. Secondly, it assumes that energy is a property of the human subject and physically contained within them. Thirdly, it assumes that a subject's behaviour accurately reflects the capacity present and that subjects can *know* and detect this capacity.

Collins argues that individuals are generally motivated to 'maximize emotional energy' (Collins, 1990). Summers-Effler (2004b) adds an additional and opposing tendency to this theorisation of energy: 'defensive strategies' which aim to 'minimize losses' of energy. Both these tendencies can be applied to energy as a process rather than a thing, and this is the key difference in my use of energy, as they suggest that energy can be a process which one is open to or closed off to and shielded from in varying degrees. Collins and Summers-Effler's work is therefore useful both in theorising what I am not referring to in relation to energy, and additionally offering openings for an alternative view of energy. Summers-Effler's (2004b) 'defensive strategies' is of particular importance to this theorisation as it highlights the way in which subjects can be both open to and closed to energy 'flows'. If energy states are not considered to correlate to tangible and quantifiable capacities present then 'defensive strategies' are not about protecting an individual's reserves of energy but about closing off or shielding from energy 'flows' and influence. This is not to say that individuals cannot experiencing draining and depleting feelings and therefore adopt strategies to counter this, as this is an important addition to energy theorisation, but rather that in my theorisation this is not a literal draining and depleting but rather a feeling of being depleted/drained and therefore a seeking of defence against such feelings.

If energy is instead considered something which one is open to or closed off to in varying degrees, then energy is about more than the individual, it is about a relationship to the surrounding space, and all the elements contained within this surrounding space. I refer to varying degrees of openness to energy as opposed to high or low levels found in the work of Collins, as this is simplistic

and problematic assuming a simplistic scale of energy, and a universal experience of and capacity for energy. Instead of considering energy as truly empty or full it is considered shielded, hidden, overflowing, circulating etc. The dualisms I have discussed above, high/low energy and regeneration and depletion, too easily suggest energy as a tangible solid force which can be captured, measured, restrained. Therefore instead of energy being a self-contained individual capacity we can consider it a spatial process, after all as Lefebvre notes energy considered in isolation is “empty abstraction”:

The ‘substance...of this cosmos...has properties that can be adequately summed up by means of the three terms mentioned above [energy, space, time]...When we evoke ‘energy’, we must immediately note that energy has to be deployed within a space...Space considered in isolation is an empty abstraction: likewise energy and time. (Lefebvre, 1991: 12)

Drawing on Lefebvre’s work, energy and space cannot be separated out from each other but are instead tangled up in one another and inseparable. Similarly Brennan writes that “we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the “individual” and the “environment”.” (Brennan, 2004: 6). Rather than considering as quite separate the role of bodies/subjects and the surrounding space in relation to energy’s ‘flow’ and contagion (or lack of contagion), Brennan argues that this separation is quite artificial and arbitrary, and perhaps therefore unnecessary. Is it perhaps better to think in terms of a whole set of interconnected (or disconnected) relations (or non-relations). Brennan suggests that there is no secure distinction between the individual and the environment “at the level of physical and biological exchange”:

One cannot grasp what is really distinctive about distinctiveness or individuality without first appreciating that it is not to be taken for granted. It is not to be taken for granted precisely because of the artificiality of the distinction between the individual and the environment at the level of physical and biological exchange. At this level, the energetic affects of others enter the person, and the person’s affects, in

turn, are transmitted to the environment. Here lies the key to why it is that people in groups, crowds, and gatherings can often be “of one mind”. Moreover, once the physical and organic levels are taken into account, one can begin to appreciate that other environmental factors are at work in the transmission of energy and affect.

(Brennan, 2004: 8)

If this view is adopted then energy can be thought of as not ‘possessed’ or ‘transmitted’ by actors but circulating in and through people, objects, and spaces. Therefore it is problematic to label energies as ‘ours’ or as contained within ourselves. The aim here is therefore to build on Bennett’s “vital materiality”, rather than energy she refers to ‘vitality’

By “vitality” I mean the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own. (Bennett, 2010: viii)

While our choice of words differs the premise is the same: that agency is possessed by more-than human actors. Further that more-than-human elements are not merely extras in energy dynamics but important actors. The purpose of this section was to suggest that more actors are involved and part of energy dynamics. If there are more actors at work than is realised, then equally there are more acts involved beyond the obvious ‘acts’, and furthermore that the acts for which potential is created are more-than these obvious acts.

## **Conclusions**

Activism research, as we have seen, is often about trying to find that which drives and causes activism, as if there were some straightforward formula, presumably to both better understand ‘activism’ as a phenomenon and to create more of it. While I agree that there is more to activism than what we ‘see’, like Kraftl and Horton (2009) I believe, though I would go further than they do and state that it is arguably ‘never’ (rather than simply ‘not’ ‘always’) “so easy to

discern precisely *where* activism *comes from*, and *ends*.” (ibid: 22, my emphasis). The concern here then is with that which is *beyond* the typical actualised act of activism. That there is never a precise beginning and ending to an act of activism, that there is no need for such precision, that it is in these very openings and moments not-quite and could-be in which the very ‘energy’ of activism resides. The ‘energy of activism’ is thus conceived as this very restlessness, this unwillingness to settle for things as they are, this sense that there could-be other ways of being. That is not to say that this ‘restlessness’ powers or drives activism but rather that this restlessness relates to the varying presence and alignment of the conditions for action such as an openness to action, a capacity to act, the space for action, a form for action, and the tools for action.

If energy, conceived as the potential for action and specifically the presence of the conditions for action, is the concern here, then the problematic which follows is how do we research this presence, since we are clearly in the realm of the non-representational and not-quite tangible with this use of energy. How then do we think activism differently and how do we research this new understanding of activism? The interest here is in exploring the presence of the potential for action which inevitably is an intangible, fleeting and ambiguous thing to attempt to research. The aim then is to attempt to theoretically disentangle this process.

## Chapter 4

### Methodology:

#### Exploring and Presenting the Energies of Activism

To reiterate the overarching objective of the thesis, as introduced in the initial chapter of the thesis, is, stated simply, to contribute to understanding of activism agency. This aim was begun in the previous chapters by unpacking some of the assumptions present around the act of activism within the literature and more broadly. Illuminating such assumptions both situates current understanding and its limitations, and therefore in turn paves the way for a rethinking and the development of an alternative understanding. The rethinking I wish to propose is an understanding of the agency of activism through the lens of ‘energy’, where energy is conceived of as the conditions of action rather than as singular, human energies which straightforwardly proceed and produce action. The aim of my methodology, and the empirical material produced via this methodology, is to demonstrate this conception of activism agency in three ways in relation to: the act of activism, the actors of activism, and the production of activism (the three elements which Thrift (1996) identifies as composing ‘agency’):

- 1) To develop understanding of *what counts as an act* in activism by exploring a variety of different forms of climate change activism through a more-than-representational lens.
- 2) To expand understanding of *who counts as an actor* in activism by exploring the role of the more-than-human in activism spaces and practices.
- 3) To contribute to understanding of *how the act of activism is produced* by exploring the relation between emotions and affects and the act of activism and developing a particular conception of ‘energy’.

While the overarching objective situates the methodology within the broad activism literature, the aims situate this research within the non-representational, more-than-human, and the affect literature. In particular, non-

representational theory is considered the overarching methodological context of the three aims as the act of activism, the more-than-human and affect, and the conditions for action more broadly, are here understood as more-than-representational. The overarching objective and aims therefore situate the research within the contrasting activism and non-representational literatures, which have contrasting methodological tendencies. The former literature, the activism literature, tends to be empirically rich, accessible and often participatory. While the latter literature, non-representational theory, as well as the more-than-human and affect literatures, tend to be abstract (or at least empirically limited and distant), theoretically dense, and unapologetically non-participatory. Such tendencies are not natural extensions of the epistemologies of these literatures, but rather, I would argue, a result of the dominance of particular academics, and in turn therefore particular approaches, within these literatures. Importantly, these dominances, and the ingrained assumptions they produce, influenced my methodological approach right from the onset.

If we turn first to non-representational theory, as a theory or school of thought its essential premise is the previous dominance of representations in the social sciences and the way in which so much of lived experience eludes representation. However, the academics which dominate this literature tend towards abstract and theoretical dense explorations, here I refer to academics such as: Thrift (1996, 2008), McCormack (2002, 2003), and the Anderson and Harrison's edited collection (2010). In turn this approach becomes ingrained as the 'correct' and only non-representational approach. Or in other words, it is assumed that research from a non-representational theoretical perspective cannot involve, for example, participatory methodology, or a more grounded and empirically dense approach. The opposite is the case in the researchers who dominate the activist literature, here I refer in particular to: Routledge (1997, 2003, 2004, 2008) Chatterton (2002, 2005, 2006, 2008), Pickerill (2003, 2007, 2008a), Halfacree (1999, 2004, 2006) and Jon Anderson (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2007). Their dominance means that a grounded and empirically dense approach becomes ingrained as the correct methodology, as though to bring too much theory into such research is to somehow undermine its activist nature. Of course theory is often seen as opposed to practice, activism in its very literal definition and philosophy is action rather than words, doing rather than simply thinking or

talking about doing. Additionally, the academics who dominate the activism literature tend to be easily identifiable as activists themselves, even if they do not explicitly identify themselves as such. It is easy therefore as a new activism/non-representational researcher to feel as though your research can only fit into and satisfy one or the other. This division is however arbitrary and not a natural extension of the epistemological foundations of either field, as I shall aim to show in the following section. Such divergent tendencies mean that these two bodies of literature, theoretically dense literatures of non-representational theory and the empirically rich activism literature, are rarely brought into conversation. This is therefore a specific methodological aim: to bring these two literatures and approaches together.

There are points in which the methodological aims of these two literatures could be said to connect and overlap, in particular the emphasis and importance placed on practice by both literatures. Non-representational literature with its emphasis on practice implies a practice based methodology, that in order to research the practice or doing of life one must practice and participate as well, rather than merely observing practice. For example, McCormack's (2002) work on dance, and Wiley's (2005) work on walking. Such work seeks to immerse the researcher as a body in the practice at hand and create a detailed account of these experiences. Similarly the activism research highlighted above favours an immersive approach for both ethical and methodological reasons, that in order to write about the struggles of activism one must experience the doing of activism, and in doing activism one can give back by contributing to an activist cause. This tendency of an insider over an outsider methodological approach in the activism research I encountered is perhaps partly due to the fact that these researchers are often already 'activists' themselves, even if they do not consider themselves 'worthy' of this label (e.g. Pickerill, 2008). An implicit assumption is that the practice of activism cannot truly be grasped if a researcher is not already an activist, that the 'activist' is the only one capable of knowing the activist world or the 'true' experience of activism.

The apparent absence of non-representational theory from activism research is surprising given that activism is often described and implied as an 'embodied' practice which is beyond representation (e.g. Routledge 2008, Brown and Pickerill, 2009b). While "the world does not resolve or come to rest"

(Beckett 1987: 19, quoted in Dewsbury et al, 2002: 437) often it is assumed that the act of activism *does*. By which I mean that the act of activism is often considered an endpoint or outcome, rather than a doing and process which cannot be ‘accurately’ represented in research. Additionally, the fieldwork here revealed that in the doing of activism itself activists are continuously grappling with the more-than-representational nature of their causes, dreams, and experiences, often employing a variety of tools to tell stories, present issues, and encourage action: cartoons, photography, artwork, poetry, music, theatrical performances etc. Equally, the examples here often emphasise the importance of the doing and experiencing of activist practices, approaches, and ways of living e.g. experiencing ecological living practices and learning road blockading techniques through practice at the climate camp, and the experience weeks of the eco-village which are as much about experiencing the alternative space of the eco-village as learning low-impact building techniques through practice. Therefore while the literatures encountered here, both non-representational and activism, argue for greater attention to the practice or doing of life, via a practical approach to the doing of research, such arguments were equally reinforced in the field.

Therefore in order to develop my methodological approach I drew inspiration from both non-representational (Wiley, 2005, McCormack, 2002, Dewsbury, 2010; Thrift, 1996, 2000) and activist literatures (J. Anderson, 2004b; Krupar, 2007; Summers-Effler, 2010), and activism itself. My approach is best summarised as a participatory immersive methodology, participatory here refers to a participant centred participant observation, so called ‘observant participation’, rather than participatory in the traditional sense of participatory action research (PAR). Instead, PAR involves working collaboratively with research participants and explicitly developing mutually beneficial areas of research (see Kindon et al, 2007). Although, even such research does not always work out to the advantage of both researcher and participants, and such research can become a role reversal of power, from researcher to participants, rather than a sharing or removing of power. Just as research which does not set out to be participatory and mutually beneficial can become participatory and/or beneficial in unexpected and unplanned ways.

The immersive aspect of this participatory immersive approach sought to be immersive in two senses, firstly attempting to immerse myself in the field as a

participant, an activist, a researcher, and as a feeling and sensing body using the practice of observant participation. Secondly, this approach sought to be immersive via in-depth interviews which immersed me in the activist worlds of others, exploring their routes into activism and activist journeys so far. This immersive approach also applied to my analysis and the way I choose to present my empirical material in the thesis itself, namely by constructing immersive narratives of the fieldwork experiences I attempted to (re-)immerse myself and the reader in the field. I drew on remnants of the fieldwork to construct these stories: observant participation notes, interview notes and recordings, fieldwork sound recordings, photographs, and ‘things’ collected in the field.

My methodology therefore seeks to be a particular combination of activism and non-representational research in that it aims to be empirical rich and immersive, in the way that much activist research is, but also theoretically rich in the way that much non-representational research is. Therefore, while to some extent I countered the ingrained assumptions around the methodological approach for non-representational theory by striving to undertake a large amount of empirical work, and countered ingrained assumptions around activist research as empirical weighted over the theoretical, I was still blinkered in my methodological choices by the dominances of the literature. For example, I did not feel that my research could take an explicitly participatory approach as I felt such an approach could not be used in relation to a non-representational subject matter. In the next section I shall outline in more detail the epistemological foundations of my methodological approach.

### **Bridging the non-representational and activism research divide: Developing a non-representational activist approach**

It is important to note that the conception of activism agency outlined at the beginning of this chapter, in the aims and overall objective, did not simply emerge from the literature to then be reinforced and confirmed in the field, but rather co-emerged from the field and the literature. While the overall objective of wishing to contribute to understanding of activism has always been present, the aims stated above were not the aims with which I began or which brought me to this topic, as I discussed in the initial chapter of this thesis. Therefore the

methodology was far from a straightforward one, methodologies and research aims are of course never fixed and often evolve, but because of the ingrained assumptions around the agency of activism which I myself was equally ingrained with, this process was perhaps an even more meandering and co-emergent one. Our ingrained epistemological and methodological assumptions are therefore hard to break free from even as a 'new' researcher.

My own methodological fears on approaching this research were, I realised, largely based on outdated and ingrained epistemological and ontological assumptions, assumptions which Dewsbury draws out in his non-representational methodological discussions: the 'know-and-tell' methodological approach: "the point is that performative, non-representational and affect based research is all about cutting into the 'dogmatic image of what counts as thought' (Thrift, 2004b: 81) and destabilizing the 'know-and-tell' politics of much sociological methodology" (Dewsbury, 2010: 322). To consider our research as needing to accurately reflect the world 'out there,' and deeming it a failure if not, is somewhat outmoded. Non-representational activist research then should "not draw its worth from *living up* to reality" but rather "what we should seek, instead, are worthwhile ways of *living with* the real" (Dewsbury, 2010: 335, emphasis original). Such assumptions were despite being a new researcher, demonstrating the ingrained nature of these modes of thought. These modes of thought manifest themselves in relation to my conceptions of the 'activist' identity and knowing the activist experience, and my conceptions of energy itself.

Firstly, while I considered myself an activist prior to undertaking this research, I conceived of the activist identity in a hierarchy so that I placed myself on the lower end of the activist spectrum i.e. not a true activist. It was only in carrying out direct action, such as the example with which I began the thesis, in which I became, temporarily, a 'true' activist, and as I participated in such actions rarely and not regularly ultimately I was not a 'true' activist. This feeling was for me further reinforced by being a researcher of activism, especially as I considered myself the 'wrong' kind of activism researcher: a non-participatory and theoretical researcher. The identity of 'activist' is often privileged in this way, by both activist and activist-academics who frequently talk of not being 'worthy' of the label of 'activist' (Pickerill, 2008a). This perspective in turn fed

into my epistemological approach, if I was not truly an activist then how could I know and accurately convey the practice of activism and activist energies. I therefore assumed that my experiences and observations would be wrong or inaccurate. I assumed that as an academic researcher as opposed to a ‘proper’ activist, as well as a ‘new’ as opposed to experienced and advanced researcher, I was ill placed to detect such energies. In turn, this of course assumes that there is a single and correct account of the activism experience and activism energies to accurately represent.

Therefore, secondly, such outdated and ingrained ontological assumptions manifest themselves in particular ways in relation to energy. For example, that in observing energy dynamics to be *here* rather than *there*, and in *this* form rather than *that*, I might in my pinpointing of energy as *here* and *this* get it wrong (that it might actually be *there* and *that*) as though there were a right and singular form of energy dynamics, and energy was a tangible ‘thing’. Here the theorising of my use of energy has evolved as a direct result of my field experiences and reflecting on these experiences. This theoretical problem, of seeing energy as a thing rather than a process, was unpacked in the previous chapter but there is a further broader ontological issue at work here. Namely that there is a correct and singular reality of activist energy dynamics out there which needs to be accurately detected and represented, rather than a infinite number of perceptions and experiences.

As Dewsbury writes: “there is no *one* world out there” (2010: 332, my emphasis), and that as such “*The world is more excessive than we can theorise*” (Dewsbury *et al*, 2002: 437, emphasis original). The energies of activism, that is the conditions for action in activism, are therefore too ‘excessive’ to be fully captured here. However, that should not be the aim or the intention because, as stated in the introduction to this chapter: “the world does not resolve or come to rest”: ‘the creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place everyday’ (Beckett, 1987, p.19)” (*ibid*). Even then if one was to attempt to cover every aspect, one would find that: “there is always something exceptional, somebody else; an accursed share, a dangerous supplement, a restless spirit, another example to be given” (*ibid*: 438). Therefore, it is important to be aware of and counter this desire to be exhaustive and complete in our empirical

research, otherwise we set ourselves an impossible task and overlook what our research *is* doing rather than what it is not.

This is therefore the task ahead, to acknowledge that in researching the more-than-representational (Lorimer, 2005) there is a fundamental difficulty in conveying it. But that is not to say that one should not try, and as Dewsbury argues below it is this very difficulty which demonstrates the more-than-representational nature of the worlds we inhabit. Arguably the very essence of activism, and therefore equally activism research, is in the striving and trying no matter how seemingly impossible the task or how seemingly outweighing the odds. Therefore in a non-representational activist methodological approach one should embrace the striving, and trial and error nature of research itself: “No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better” (Beckett, 1987: 7, quoted in Dewsbury, 2010: 322):

Researching then, whatever the methodology, has always been and is always about ever trying and ever failing: the difference of a performative approach is that it relishes this failure, ‘no matter’, and uses it to mount a serious political critique of the restrictions that methodological protocols might impose on what can count as knowledge. It therefore advocates resolute experimentalism — ‘try again, fail again, fail better’. Whether to fail better is to fail ever more spectacularly or to fail less worse than last time (Dewsbury, 2010: 322)

Such an experimental approach is echoed in activism research, and in the very doing of activism itself, for example Pickerill and Chatterton (2006) describe the experiments of the 2005 G8 protest camp, one of the precursors to the Climate Camps, and indeed argue that “The whole site was an organic experiment in autonomous politics” (740). Similarly, Hodkinson and Chatterton (2006) write of the way in which Occupied Social Centres (OSCs) in London “experiment with alternative ways of living without self-marginalizing, escaping or acquiescing to capitalist property relations” (307). Experimentalism and a striving approach are therefore fundamental to activism itself.

The epistemological approach of this non-representational activist research then recognises that methods will always fail to capture ‘reality’

because there is no single final reality to capture; the world is always excessive and always exceeds that which is and can be captured. But this does not make research pointless it simply places it in a different position and different relationship to the world 'out there'. Namely research is then part of this messy (Law, 2004) excessive world rather than above and separate from it as if purifying it from above. Research then always tries to, and fails to, represent 'reality', but being aware of this can make the prospect of empirical research more daunting, because it is hard to shake off the desire to get at 'reality' and 'truth', especially when researching activism.

Activism research is often attempting to convey the voices and cause of the activists at hand further afield, and in doing so contribute to the furthering of the particular cause of concern. There is therefore often extra pressure on activism research, especially in its most participatory forms, to accurately represent the activist voices and experience, but arguably even such research can only ever be an "attempt" at "articulation" (Dewsbury, 2010). Similarly, if we conceive of the conditions for activism, and specially the act of activism, more-than-human and affect, as always beyond representation and articulation this need not doom the research to failure. The aim should not be to accurately represent such aspects, in line with non-representational work I acknowledge the impossibility of this task but still wish to *try* to convey them in spite of this apparent doomed-to-fail nature of representing that which eludes representation. The aim instead is to engage with the conditions for activism via trying and attempting to convey them, the process then rather than the outcome. The approach here is then an "attempt" at an "articulation":

It is worth remembering as we set about this task that it is not a transparent representation that we are after, nor is it about the representation being a true reflection of the empirical experience or event being investigated...rather it is a stance that 'wishes all the same to say' in that it is *the attempt at articulation* rather than its success that counts, and where the articulation made will always be performative in itself.  
(Dewsbury, 2010: 334, my emphasis)

As stated above, arguably the very essence of activism itself is the trying and attempting, rather than the outcomes or endpoints by which activism is so often measured. From Dewsbury's perspective we should as non-representational researchers embrace the fact that what we articulate will *always* be something else, that in our attempts to articulate what we have encountered we will always produce *something else*. Similarly, activism research cannot hope to 'accurately' represent the entirety of the activism and activists concerned, therefore each piece of activism research becomes something else and perhaps even an activism in itself. We are as researchers *creating* something new rather than *recreating* something which is already 'out there'.

The remainder of this chapter will be split into three parts, firstly, 'choosing the field' introducing in more depth the three case studies: the direct action activism of Camp for Climate Action, the regular more mundane activism of a local Transition group, and activism as a lifestyle in itself through the Lammas eco-village. Secondly, 'acting in the field' outlining in more detail the participatory immersive approach, and precisely what this approach involved in the field, that is, how the observant participation and interviews were carried out, and reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of these methods. Thirdly, in the final section, 'ethics in the field', I will reflect on the ethical issues of the methods and the field sites, and how I sought to counter these issues.

### **Choosing 'the field': Identifying the Case Studies**

In order to approach the field, the field itself must first be identified or chosen, this was therefore the first methodological task. This required, firstly, a narrowing of my focus, activism being an incredibly broad and varied phenomenon. Additionally, I wished to explore a contemporary and thus ongoing activist cause, as well as a cause with which I personally identified. Therefore climate change was the chosen 'cause' being both varied in the activist responses it provoked and contemporary, and in turn ongoing and evolving, but equally a common thread through which to weave my examples. While climate change was chosen as a cause, it was more specifically climate change activism within the UK which I chose, being the form of activism I was most familiar with and had some connection to through previous research and personal involvement.

This choice equally served more practical purposes of language and travel, and posed no methodological issues due to the fact that activism in a broad sense was being explored, rather than a country specific form of activism or a comparison of activism between countries. Additionally, the UK appeared to be a key centre of climate change activism with a wide range of such activism, and a regular and substantial cultural presence via direct action groups such as Camp for Climate Action (CCA), Rising Tide, Plane Stupid, and Climate Rush. But equally, climate change direct action had become a more normalised cultural and political practice within the UK with regular national marches, and climate change had worked its way into everyday practices and life choices in the UK, replacing previous more generalised environmental concerns (Hulme, 2008).

Therefore focusing on climate change activism within the UK was by no means restrictive, but instead offered a wide range of practices and approaches, and this range was central, as indicated by my first research aim. I wished to explore various types of activism to explore energy dynamics as an important aspect of activism more broadly, rather than just an aspect of the most seemingly energetic forms of activism. The desire to research a range of activism was also driven by the need to counter the literature and broader privileging of overt forms of activism, namely the more spectacular and overtly exciting forms of ‘direct’ action (see the Review of Geographical Activism Literature in Chapter 2), and the hierarchies of action and scale of effect which this privileging reproduces. However, if I were to exclude direct action entirely from my exploration then I would, in directly, reinforce other forms of action as separate and lesser forms of action.

Within my cultural and research experience of climate change activism there appeared to be three key forms of such activism (which were mirrored in the literature in terms of activism more broadly, see chapter 2): direct action forms of climate change activism such as national marches and protest camps, more regular and localised forms of climate change activism such as local climate change groups organising smaller scale and more localised forms of activism, and finally climate change activism as a lifestyle in which a whole lifestyle is designed and lived with climate change in mind (e.g. minimising an individual’s or family’s impact on climate change by living more ‘lightly’ and ecologically). In each case activism could be said to be part of the everyday, the

everyday rhythms and practices of day-to-day life, rather than seeing activism as a practice which the everyday contributes to (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). It is these three types of climate change activism which formed the framework for my choice of case studies. Choosing the case studies through this framework allowed for the experiencing of different temporal and spatial scales of action. In addition, this framework allowed for a variety of energetic angles to be explored: the immediacy and intensity of direct action, the frustrations and maintenance of regular activism, and the negotiation of day-to-day rhythms and choices with activist concerns. Additionally, in line with the theoretical concerns outlined in the previous chapter, exploring a variety of sites and style of activism enables a greater mix of acts (in line with my first research aim), spatial elements, and relations to be encountered, including a variety of more-than-human elements and affective experiences (the concerns of my second and third research aims). Therefore this variety provides the opportunity to counter the ingrained assumptions within the activist literature around activist agency, the overall objective of the thesis.

For the first type of climate change action identified, overt and extraordinary acts of ‘direct’ action, the chosen case study was the Camp for Climate Action (CCA), a group which for me epitomised climate change activism, at least in its most dramatic and news worthy form. The group and its camps had received significant media attention, especially the notorious<sup>1</sup> G20 Climate Camp in London at the European Climate Exchange in April 2009. As an activist collective CCA was most known for its yearly ‘Climate Camp’, national protest camps gathering together climate change activists from across the UK (and further afield) for a week of training, skill-sharing, and communal ecological living. The skill sharing and training aspects of these camps were largely in relation to direct action, and the ecological living involved: vegan communal cooking, compost toilets, renewable energy (solar panels and small self-made wind turbines), grey water systems (using hay bales to filter washing up water), as well as composting and recycling. The camps were divided into neighbourhoods and activists camped in the neighbourhood which corresponded

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<sup>1</sup> Notorious for the actions of the police: kettling and police brutality. Though this was not the first time that CCA had encountered this sort of behaviour from the police: the Climate Camp of the previous summer at Kingsnorth coal-fired power station in Kent also become notorious for its police brutality and over-policing, but this was less widely reported than the events of the G20.

to where they were from (e.g. North East). This dividing of the camp served practical purposes, for example each neighbourhood had a kitchen so that cooking was on a more manageable scale. An additional intention was to allow people to meet other activists from their area, the hope being that they might form ‘affinity groups’ and carry out activism together in-between the main yearly climate camps. The camps, and CCA itself, were non-hierarchical and egalitarian in their philosophy and this was reflected in their organisational structure and the running of the camps themselves: employing a working group structure and consensus decision making processes, with everyone expected to play their part and contribute equally.

Alongside demonstrating an alternative lifestyle, an ecological and egalitarian lifestyle, the climate camps were also about directly protesting against a particular cause of climate change, and demonstrating the climate change activist movement. Each camp was held at sites which were perceived as major contributors to climate change, with previous camps at: Kingsnorth coal fired power station in Kent in 2008, near Heathrow airport in 2007, both of which were in response to proposals for expansions, and the first in 2006 adjacent to Drax coal power station in Yorkshire: “the UK’s biggest single source of carbon dioxide” (CCA, 2009). Following my fieldwork with CCA, which involved attending several camps and direct action events including the 2009 Climate Camp which unbeknown to me was to be one of their last<sup>2</sup>, the CCA and yearly national (UK) Climate Camps ended.<sup>3</sup>

The protest camp form of the climate camp can of course be traced through previous activism in the UK and beyond, indeed in their 2009 Climate Camp handbook CCA situated their activism within this broader activist history: the counter-capitalism/globalisation of the late nineties to two thousands

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<sup>2</sup> The last being the camp the following year near the Royal Bank of Scotland headquarters (RBS is a major investor in the Canadian Tar Sands, a highly polluting and environmentally destructive oil extraction project),

<sup>3</sup> In February 2011 at a reflective retreat entitled ‘Space for Change’ it was decided that the group would no longer hold yearly national camps as it was proposed that a change of tactics and approach was needed, and that action should be frequent and ongoing as opposed to all their activist energies being invested in a single yearly event (CCA, 2010). Several things followed including the forming of a new group the ‘Climate Justice Collective’, the holding of smaller regional climate camps and more regular occupations, the forming of Frack-Off (“a national network taking action against Fracking: shale gas extraction”), and other CCA activists have been involved in anti-cut activism such as ‘UK Uncut’. So while Climate Camp and CCA seemed to have run its course clearly the activist energies of those involved are far from ‘burnt out’.

epitomised by the Seattle protests of 1999 (Klein, 2001) and more recently G8 protests (Routledge, 2004), to the road protest and Reclaim The Streets movements (McKay, 1996, 1998) of the early nineties, to iconic protest camps such as Greenham Common (Cresswell, 1994, 1996) in the 1980s, and the counter cultural movement of the 1960s and 70s. Alongside being one of the most noticeable forms of contemporary direct action activism, CCA was also an especially interesting example in that it both carried out conventional direct action practices of occupation and confrontation acts (such as attempting to break into coal fired power-stations), but also used its very occupation (the Climate Camps) as a experimentation of and display of lifestyle forms of activism (namely ecological and egalitarian living practices). Equally, the group held regular national meetings to maintain the organisation and prepare for the annual camps, the CCA then could have served as an example of all three forms of climate change activism, however I did not want to limit my empirical exploration to a single activist group.

It is important to note that prior to the fieldwork this first form of activism, 'direct' action, was the activism with which I had least experience. Apart from the climate change march with which I began this thesis, my activism experience was primarily student campaigning within a university campus (a People and Planet group), which involved holding stalls and organising events to promote a particular cause or issue. This lack of prior experience clearly has implications for my research practice, as I shall discuss later. Additionally, because of this lack of prior experience my conceptions of direct action were largely media shaped, in which such activism is often portrayed as violent and dangerous, this being the most newsworthy. The second form of activism, which I shall discuss below, most closely resembled my previous activist experience, and the third chosen example involved a project and group of activists I had already encountered through previous research (my Masters' research), therefore I was most out of my comfort zone with this first case study.

The second case study, chosen as an example of the second form of climate change activism outlined above, activism which forms a regular and ongoing part of everyday life, was a local Transition group. This was a group I had already become involved in out of personal interest, and it was as far as I could tell the only local climate change activist group (at the time) which was

meeting regularly and could therefore provide an example of activism as a regular and more mundane part of life. During the initial stages of my research the group had only recently been set up and was still establishing itself and therefore additionally provided an interesting example in this respect; of the dynamics of a new activist group. The broader movement within which the group was situated was the Transition Town movement, now simply known as the Transition movement, a network of local groups which are attempting to transition their town, city, or village to a more 'resilient' ecological and economic state. This desire and need to 'transition' is set within the context of the movement's three key issues of concern: climate change, peak oil and economic insecurity, which it considers intertwined issues. The movement's argument is that as modern society is so reliant on oil, and supplies of oil are peaking as the oil which remains becomes increasingly difficult and expensive to extract, the need for significant change is inevitable. Change in the movement's view should be made sooner, rather than later, so that a gradual, rather than sudden, transition can be made. Each local group aims to help transition its local town/city/village to a low carbon, less energy intensive, and more resilient state. This process involves local outreach such as communicating and educating on climate change, peak oil and the transition approach, but also group initiated projects and the encouragement of local practical action and projects. Additionally, a central aim of many groups is to develop an Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP) which details how the local community can make this transition. My fieldwork within the Transition group involved attending the group's monthly 'hub' meetings, and contributing to the events and activities of the group, including the initial stages of the development of the group's EDAP.

Originating in the UK the Transition approach has now spread much further afield: "from towns in Australia to neighbourhoods in Portugal, from cities in Brazil to rural communities in Slovenia, from urban locations in Britain to islands off the coast of Canada" (Transition Network, 2012c). The group was therefore part of a broader 'Transition Network'. The mechanisms of the Transition Network are similar to CCA in that the network forms the broader framework of tools and support for action, while the local groups themselves are independent and autonomous. The Transition movement was founded on

permaculture<sup>4</sup> principles, and originated out of a permaculture course which led to the development of the first EDAP. The founder of the local Transition group I chose to research was a permaculture teacher, and two others in the group were undertaking training in permaculture, as these were all founding members and the group itself was relatively small this was a significant underlying philosophy. But equally much like CCA, the group was underlined with multiple philosophies including anarchist, anti-capitalist, and environmentalism. Much like CCA, the group was therefore a hybrid of social justice and environmental activism. But unlike CCA they took a very different approach to activism and to action. While CCA sees itself as part of continuation of vigorous and heroic action, the Transition approach is one of a scaling down of action and arguably a more DiY and direct approach to action, as CCA is primarily concerned with directly confronting 'climate criminals' while Transition encourages the active changing of lifestyles and direct altering of the local space. The picture Transition paints of previous environmental activism is primarily one of failure, as opposed to the success highlighted by CCA, and it advocates a change in approach and the 'telling of new stories' which highlight the potential utopian future over the apocalyptic future.

The third and final case study chosen was the Lammas eco-village being built on Pont y Gafel Farm near the village of Glandwr in Pembrokeshire, Wales, as an example of a lifestyle form of activism. Lammas was chosen for two main reasons, firstly because it had been the focus of my Masters' research and therefore I had both an empirical background to the example and an already established research connection. Secondly, it made a particularly interesting example because when I had researched the project previously they had been in the midst of a planning struggle for the eco-village, now, at the start of this period of research, they had only just recently obtained planning permission and were just beginning to build the eco-village. I was therefore in a unique position

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<sup>4</sup> Permaculture is defined by the Permaculture association thus: "Permaculture combines three key aspects: 1. an ethical framework, 2. understandings of how nature works, 3. a design approach...The word 'permaculture' comes from '**permanent agriculture**' and '**permanent culture**' - it is about living lightly on the planet, and making sure that we can sustain human activities for many generations to come, in harmony with nature. Permanence is not about everything staying the same. It's about stability, about deepening soils and cleaner water, thriving communities in self-reliant regions, biodiverse agriculture and social justice, peace and abundance. (Permaculture Association website, 2012)

of having been to the site before planning permission was granted, when the site was merely a collection of fields, and could now research a literal building and establishing of an activist lifestyle.

Lammas consists of several families each with their own plot of land at the eco-village on which to build their own eco-home, grow their own food, and establish a livelihood, in addition to a community hub building (which was in the process of being built). During the period in which I was researching most of the families were living in temporary dwellings on their plot (caravans and large tents) and had begun or built at least one of the several buildings which would eventually form their plot. The eco-village can be considered as such (eco) in that it involves green architecture (green building materials and techniques and built largely by hand by the residents themselves), green technology (renewable energy), and self-sufficient sustainable lifestyles (residents will meet 75% of their needs from their land including growing the majority of their own food). However, the eco-village is not simply about creating an opportunity for these families to live eco and self-sufficient lifestyles, it is more importantly about creating a “precedence” and encouraging others to establish similar lifestyles through: its website and other documentation (the project features in several books and a documentary), volunteering opportunities, visitor days, courses and conferences held at the site. My fieldwork at Lammas was through the volunteering opportunities offered by the project: a volunteer experience week, and a week spent volunteering on a family’s plot.

The project can of course be situated, like the first and second case studies, within the ‘counter cultural’ movement, ‘counter’ in that it “radically diverges from values and assumptions that have been in the mainstream of...society at least since...the seventeenth century” (Roszak, 1970: xii, quoted in Halfacree, 2006: 313) and in particular within a particular ‘back-to-the-land’ movement, both of which have had two phrases in the past 40-50 years:

Back-to-the-land has tended to see resurgence in combination with the flowering of typically anarchistic variants of radical politics...two periods...are suggested: the late 1960s/1970s and the late 1990s/2000s....back-to-the-land can also be linked to other radical rural practices...such as self-sufficiency...low-impact building design...and

permaculture...Moreover, striving for consubstantiality and a more ecocentric lifestyle is not the only feature associating back-to-the-land with the counter-culture. Typically entwined within this striving to connect with the land is, for example, a rejection of many other key features of our modern capitalist society, such as the near single-minded acquisition of commodities and money, careerism and an emphasis on disposability and ephemerality. (Halacree, 2006: 313-4)

The Lammas project is situated within both this broader low-impact history within the UK, but also within a strong local culture of low-impact living within South Wales. Such local culture includes ‘Tipi Valley’, a ‘hippie community’ established in the 1960/70s where residents live in a secluded woodland in Tipies and similar make-shift structures. Additionally, nearby is the community of Brithdir Mawr, home to Tony Wrench (a key figure in the low-impact living movement) and his roundhouses: small one-roomed round houses made of natural materials with a circular reciprocal roof in which wooden tree trunks are arranged in such a way as to be self supporting. Several roundhouses were being built at the eco-village, generally as guest houses and temporary homes for residents while their bigger actual homes were being built.

Out of this local context emerged ‘policy 52’, a local county council low-impact development policy, the first policy of its kind in the UK, it was this policy which inspired Lammas and provided the opportunity for it to set a “precedence”. Lammas was the first eco-village in the UK to obtain, and to attempt to obtain, planning permission prior as opposed to post build. Similar forms of low-impact living have a much longer history in the UK<sup>5</sup> but have tended to keep a low profile and have not actively sought official approval. Prior to ‘policy 52’, official approval would most likely not have been granted for such projects due to numerous planning laws and building regulations, not to mention potential local opposition, which are difficult for such developments to meet. However despite the establishment of the policy the local council were very resistant to granting permission for Lammas, and the group spent several years attempting to obtain planning permission via the local council before taking their

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<sup>5</sup> For other examples of low-impact living within the UK see Chatterton and Pickerill (2010)

case to the Welsh National Assembly where permission was granted<sup>6</sup>. The nature of the project, and its planning struggle and eventual victory mean that, much like CCA and the Transition movement (which has received frequent media and academic attention), Lammas is a rather high profile example of such activism.

As highlighted above, the case studies were chosen due to the variety of temporal and spatial scales they provided, through which to explore the energies of activism. These temporal and spatial scales are not only in terms of the enacting of the acts themselves, but also in relation to what they seek to change or alter. Turning firstly to CCA, this group seeks to influence corporate/government action and to mobilise as many people as possible nationally and globally into climate change activism, while the Transition group seeks to mobilise people locally and effect local government. The eco-village, though it seeks to inspire people nationally and internationally into low-impact forms of living, its immediate concern is with establishing the eco-village residents' own low-impact living, partly because this establishment is necessary in order to demonstrate the potential for low-impact living to a wider audience. Although, they utilised this period of building to provide training experiences for volunteers interested in low-impact living, and to demonstrate these building processes to the wider public through visitor days.

While each case study clearly involves different spatial and temporal scales they are at the same time not reducible to or contained by scale. That is to say, the climate camp is not purely an example of direct action acts and the energy dynamics of such acts, nor is the eco-village purely an example of everyday scales of acts. Such micro and macro, continuous and one-off acts of activism occur at all sites and at all 'scales'. So while the examples were originally chosen for the variance of activist temporal and spatial scales they allowed to be demonstrated, in the field this partitioning and segmenting was problematic. The examples therefore came to demonstrate that it is not about including everyday life as a currently marginalised space as Chatterton and Pickerill argue (2006, 2010), but rather about arguing that such acts are always

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<sup>6</sup> Although the story has not ended there and following obtaining permission from the National Assembly the local council has continued to oppose the project (see the Lammas website for more details).

caught up in and immersed within everyday life, they cannot be separated out from it.

### **Acting in the field: Methodological practice in the fieldwork**

Of equal importance in approaching the field, as well as deciding exactly what ‘field’ will be approached is the *how* of the approach, that is, what methods the field will be approached with. As introduced in the beginning of this chapter the chosen approach here was a participatory immersive one. This immersion was threefold: attempting to immerse myself in the field as a researcher/body/activist via observant participation, being immersed in the activism of other activists through in-depth interviews, and finally attempting to immerse the reader and re-immersing myself in the field through the presentation of my empirical material as immersive narratives. The methodological reasoning being that this immersive and participatory approach will allow me to gather a greater amount of depth of detail on the more-than-human and affects of activism, and very processional more-than-representational nature of the act of activism, and in turn contribute to furthering understanding of the agency of activism.

As outlined in the epistemological section at the start of this chapter, instead of capturing and containing the activism encountered here in its ‘entirety’ this research is an ‘attempt’ to convey the field experiences, and through these experiences a rethinking of activism agency. In order to make this attempt I need to try to participate directly in practices of activism and immerse myself in spaces of activism. In relation to the first aim, in order to develop understanding of what counts as an act of activism the methodology needs to involve participating in a variety of activism, as well as in-depth discussion with a variety of activists around the practice of activism. Secondly, in order to expand understanding of who counts as an actor in activism and in particular the role of the more-than-human, the methodology needs to involve being immersed in activism (my own and others) in order to notice and illuminate the role of the often unnoticed more-than human elements. Finally, in relation to the third aim, in order to explore the relation between emotions and affects and the act of activism, and in turn contribute towards understanding of how action is

produced, I need to immerse myself in the field as a feeling and sensing body, as well as discussing the role of affects and emotions in activism with activists.

The third aim, in particular, involves offering the concept of ‘energy’, understood as the conditions for action, as a way through which to rethink the production of activism, namely as not straightforwardly produced but instead involving processes and relations: of alignment and openness. If we position the conditions for action and such processes within the realm of the more-than-representational, that is, as not reducible to representation, then one cannot assume that they are something which can simply be talked about and asked about. Language as a form of representation reduces and simplifies activism agency and the conditions for activism. That it is not to say that there is no point talking about energy, indeed as I shall discuss further on in this section talking about energy is useful in more than that which is said. However, a dominant ‘method’ in researching the agency of activism should first and foremost be practice: the doing of activism. By which I mean partaking and immersing oneself as fully as possible in activist practices and spaces, in other words, acting first and foremost (or rather trying to) as an activist. Rather than simply observing activism, and analysing representations of activism: whether interview transcripts, media articles and videos, or activist literature and media. Although these methods should be used alongside, as one cannot not observe, even when practising, and representations are intertwined with and inseparable from practices (Lorimer, 2005). While I cannot ‘know’ my thoughts, feelings, and experiences any more or any better than an interviewee, I can at least explore activism in greater detail and depth, through first-hand experience, than interviews generally achieve.

Therefore, the central method with which ‘the field’ was approached was observant participation, accompanied by interviews (mostly) in the field, the intention being that the interviews would compliment the observant participation rather than serving as an additional and completely separate method. The observant participation aspect of the methodological approach draws on Thrift (1996, 2000) who proposes it as an approach in some of his initial writings on non-representational theory, although it has a longer tradition beyond the discipline (e.g. Tedlock, 1991). This is literally a “flipping over of ‘participant observation’” (Dewsbury, 2010: 328) a shift in focus from observation to

participation. The immersive aspect of this and the accompanying methods draws on the immersive approach of activism researchers such as Jon Anderson (2004a and c) and Chatterton (2006), and the non-representational methodological work of Dewsbury (2010):

The idea is to get embroiled in the site and allow ourselves to be infected by the effort, investment, and craze of the particular practice or experience being investigated...It is not however an argument for losing ourselves in the activity and deterritorializing ourselves completely from our academic remit, but nor does it mean sitting on the sidelines and judging. Rather the move, in immersing ourselves in the space, is to gather a portfolio of ethnographic 'exposures' that can act as lightening rods for thought.

(Dewsbury, 2010: 328)

Observant participation as an approach is arguably more immersive than traditional participant observation, and involves deeply immersing yourself in the field site and practice at hand. In such immersion we can therefore be deeply affected both as bodies and as 'academics' through these 'lightening rod' moments in and after the field to which Dewsbury refers. Our inability to fully switch off academically in the field, or simultaneously wear the hats of academic and participant, need not necessarily be a drawback or research fault as Dewsbury above suggest. It is this simultaneous nature of our researcher bodies which make it a useful research tool in itself: "The body has recently become an important topic *of* work, but not yet something *through* which research is often done." (Crang, 2005: 232, emphasis original) Though this is less the case now, Crang's (2005) observation still has relevance, as it highlights a shift in thinking from seeing the body as an *object of* research to a device or 'machine' *for* research:

In affectual geography, the body is not seen as personal, but as transpersonal. More, the body is used to challenge the expression of emotions: the body, in this sense, is the location of the non-psychological. The body is not used to solicit telling testimony about people's lives,

instead it becomes a *device* that enables the researcher to reveal the trans-human, the non-cognitive, the inexpressible, that underlies and constitutes social life – albeit unknowingly. (Pile, 2010: 11, my emphasis)

the researcher...using her or his body directly in the field as a *recording machine* itself, knowing that writing these nervous energies, amplitudes and thresholds down, is feasible as such jottings become legitimate data for dissemination and analysis. (Dewsbury, 2010: 329, my emphasis)

Traditionally participant observation has positioned the researcher as an outsider and an observer who places themselves ‘in the field’ like an alien amongst humans. From a non-representational and activist research perspective one can position the researcher as always already within, as participating first. We cannot as researchers switch off our affective engagement with the field. Additionally affective and emotional geographies (Bondi, 2005b; Davidson et al, 2005) do not consider the feelings of the researcher themselves as irrelevant and out of place, but rather as inseparable and often a valuable addition to the research material. This perspective, of course, follows in earlier feminist and humanist traditions in geography, and the increasing prevalence of qualitative and experimental methods. The methodology here therefore equally draws on the broader qualitative research traditions. Moss notes that geographical work often uses autobiographical material or approaches yet rarely acknowledges this:

Geographers continue to use autobiography in their data collection methods (life histories, in-depth interviews in everyday lifeworld studies, full participant observation, the phenomenological method, and ethnography) and in analysis (reflexivity, positioning, situated knowledges, psychoanalysis) without directly mentioning the links to what other disciplines refer to as the autobiographical. Not explicitly recognizing such links glosses over our understanding of the various ways autobiography is (and can be) used in geography. (Moss, 2001: 9)

As Moss argues, the use of autobiography in geography is often not explicitly acknowledged, as though autobiography is somehow un-academic,

rather than a practice which can enable a depth of detail, “thick description” and “shed light on the minutiae of daily life” (*ibid*: 8). Many geographers write autobiographical stories in the form of research diaries, yet often chose to use only snippets of these stories. However, arguably such autobiography or auto-ethnography should not be used in isolation, so as to avoid being too insular or inward looking, but rather should be used alongside other methods as part of a mixed method approach, including the experiences of others through for example interviews.

This immersive approach then also involved being immersed in activist worlds via in-depth interviews which explored interviewees’ routes into activism and activist journeys so far. The majority of these interviews were carried out at the field sites, this was partly for practicality but was largely inspired by Jon Anderson’s (2004b) walking interviews. In Anderson’s walking interviews both the rhythm of walking and the activist spaces in which interviews took place could trigger memories and thought processes, allowing for a more illuminating discussion. Quoting Solnit (2001: 5) Anderson writes: “the rhythm of walking generates a rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts”:

Using the body in this way has the capacity to access the relationship between people, place and time. As meanings are sedimented in and through this processual nexus, the physiological movement of the body through place offers the opportunity to literally and metaphorically, ‘wander from plans to recollections to observations’ (Solnit, 2001, 5). A personal, peripatetic understanding of place is excavated as key contiguous associates prompt memories and excavate meanings. (Anderson, 2004b: 259-60)

Although the interviews here were stationary they were largely carried out in the field, drawing therefore on Anderson suggestion of the importance of the location of interviews. Through the interviews interviewees became direct participants in the research, often illuminating my own assumptions to me and developing the theoretical threads of the research. Therefore while the methodology here was not participatory in the conventional sense of

participatory research, it was often at times implicitly, unexpectedly and unintentionally participatory. Participatory then in the sense that the theoretical threads were evolving as much through the contribution of participants perspectives to rethinking my assumptions around activist agency, as through the literature's arguments.

The final aspect of the methodology involves the presentation of the empirical material obtained via the methods outlined above. It was in the presentation aspect of the research process in which the difficulties in attempting to articulate the more-than-representational subject matter become most felt. In the epistemological section of this chapter Dewsbury argued for an embracing of the attemptive and creative nature of the research process. Such an approach, which embraces research as the creation of something rather than an accurate recreation, can be seen in the activism work of Krupar (2007) and Summers-Effler (2010) from which I drew inspiration for this aspect of the methodology. Both Krupar and Summers-Effler's solution to this problem of articulating activism is to tell stories based on ethnographic fieldwork. Krupar (2007) writes an 'ethno-fable' with the intention to: "produce a certain affect of curiosity, concern, and outrage at the staging of nature spectacle on militarized sites by organizations that continue to produce and profit from deadly wastes" (*ibid*: 195). If as Krupar contends stories have the potential to be forms of activism in themselves, and can encourage action through the reactions they provoke, this then suggests that stories can create affective relations and immerse a reader in the research in a way which straightforward academic description cannot. It was therefore my own reaction to Krupar's work from which I drew inspiration, rather than her style of work itself which involves a more creative and experimental approach than my own. Additionally in contrast Krupar's work involves a partly fictional style of narrative whereas my own, attempts at least, to reflect the actual field experiences. In Summers-Effler's (2010) work on activism, writing stories as a way to present empirical findings emerged out of the kind of experimentation and try again approach to which Dewsbury refers:

After trying multiple styles of organising and communicating the findings from my fieldwork, I found that I could communicate emotional

dynamics more directly by writing stories...The stories evoked the feeling of my experience in the field far better than abstract description. (Summers-Effler, 2010: xii)

Both Summers-Effler and Krupar's work can be described as activism research, but also both are concerned with conveying more-than-representational and affective experiences. But it is not merely for these reasons, of similarity of concern and field, why I drew inspiration from these two approaches. Though the similarity of subject matter drew me to these texts it was on noticing my own reaction and feeling from these texts that I realised the powerful potential of empirical narratives, to both immerse a reader in the field, but also to provoke and inspire. Activism and stories go hand in hand, activists tell stories to set the scene, to tell the roots of their movement, and most importantly to inspire, this was reinforced in the fieldwork where I frequently encountered activist stories and story telling. Examples of story-telling in the field included: the welcoming speech of the climate camp which situated the camp in the history of the site of the camp (the site of the Peasant Revolt in 1381), the social story-telling on an evening of the volunteer experience week at the eco-village, and the first AGM of the Transition Group in which the group told the story of the group's progression and expansion. Similarly, in interviews activists would often tell me the story of their radicalisation. Therefore this practice of telling the field experience through stories is inspired equally by the field and by the power of these stories in the field, as it is from the literature. I will now outline exactly what my observant participation and interviews involved in the field, beginning first with observant participation, and reflect on some of the strengths and limitations of each method in the context of this research.

The fieldwork here was carried out essentially in the order of the case studies as outlined in the previous section, rather than simultaneously, meaning that my empirical material and my analysis progressed in the order of the case studies. I began with the direct action fieldwork of the CCA case study, then the Transition group; although I had joined the Transition group prior to my CCA fieldwork the majority of my active involvement in the Transition group occurred after my CCA fieldwork. The Lammas fieldwork was then the last to be carried out in the sense of beginning the fieldwork, as I continued my

involvement with the Transition group following and in-between my Lammas fieldwork. While I attended more direct action events the time spend within ‘the field’ for each case study was relatively even given that I spent two full weeks at the eco-village, and two years regularly attending Transition meetings and events.

In the first case study of CCA, my observant participation involved attending several direct actions associated with the CCA, the first being the 2009 climate camp, held in Blackheath, London, from 26<sup>th</sup> August to 2<sup>nd</sup> September. This involved participating in the camp in much the same way as other activists there: ‘swooping’ onto the camp with other activists i.e. claiming the space which was to be the camp, camping at the site, using the camps facilities (vegan communal cooking, compost toilets etc), attending neighbourhood meetings, attending workshops, helping out with camp chores (e.g. washing up), exploring the camp, attending evening entertainment, and socialising with other activists. Occasionally I would take photographs of the camp, namely of the space of the camp rather than of activists due to the difficulties of obtaining permissions (the camp was a space of constant activity and a large number of activists/visitors), this difficulty then led me to notice the clutter of the camp. As my overall fieldwork progressed photography became an important method for taking notice of and recording the more-than-human in my fieldwork. During my time at the camp I would write up notes of my experiences at night before going to sleep, this was so that activists did not feel they were being spied on and so as not to hinder my own participation, and the night seemed a natural time to reflect on the day. While recording my experiences I would also at the same time try to draw out themes which were emerging. Sometimes I went to my tent during the day to write notes, for example if an idea sprung to mind which I might forget later.

After the climate camp I attended its associated mass action, The Great Climate Swoop, at Ratcliffe-on-Soar coal fired power station near Nottingham, on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2009. Prior to the Swoop I had found a couple of local activist who were also planning to attend and arranged to travel up with them the night before the action. In Nottingham we met with organisers of the event who showed us where we would be staying that night, several places had volunteered ‘crash space’ for activists travelling from further afield, we then travelled to the event together from here in the morning. Again like the climate camp I tried to

participate in this action much like the other activists: joining the protest march to the power station, picnicking at the entrance to the power station, moving around the power station with the other activists towards the main areas of activity, and talking to other activists. At this event I was often more an observer than a participant because I did not feel comfortable (or brave) enough to participate in some of the action, such as trying to get into the power station or trying to make police think I wanted to get into the power station (some of the action aimed at misdirecting the police), and such action often seemed to be occurring elsewhere. Again I took photographs occasionally, of the space but also of the activist and police, when I took photos of people I tried not to capture activists' faces as permissions were even more difficult to obtain in this situation. At the end of the action I travelled back with the activists I had arrived with. I wrote up my notes the following day having no chance to during the day with the continuous motion and activity, and it being too dark and feeling too tired on the way back.

These two events formed the majority of my observant participation for the CCA case study. Prior to these two events I spent a couple of days at the Welsh climate camp, held between 13-16 August 2009 in Merthyr Tydfil “a community abused by coal” (CCA, 2010) specifically by an opencast coal mine on the outskirts of the town. I attended this camp simply to get a feel for what the Climate Camps involved and I therefore made limited notes. This was the first year in which smaller regional camps in Wales and Scotland had been organised before the main camp. While I missed the actual Scottish climate camp from 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> August, I attended the site of the camp, Mainshill Solidarity Camp in Mainshill Wood near Douglas in South Lanarkshire, for a weekend on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2009. The camp was set up in June 2009 on the site of a proposed opencast mine in an already heavily mined area of Scotland and in fact “one of the most heavily mined areas in Europe” (Coal Action Scotland, 2009). At Mainshill my observant participation involved camping at and exploring the site, including taking photos of the more-than-human elements of the site, talking to the activists there, and being taken on a tour of the site being protected: this was a tour which was organised for both new arrivals and concerned locals. Finally, I attended The Wave, a national climate change march organised by several organisations (including CCA) in London on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2009 to coincide with

the Copenhagen Climate Conference. I also spent a day at the COP OUT CAMP OUT a protest camp set up by CCA after this march in Trafalgar Square (where it remained despite freezing temperatures until the 18<sup>th</sup> December for the course of the talks). I primarily attended the Trafalgar camp to speak to activists there, rather than to carry out observant participation, but I also attended a direct action which had been organised for the afternoon of that day at the Danish embassy. I took photographs of the space of the Trafalgar camp but not of the embassy action (due to not wanting to reveal activists' identities), and again like the Swoop I made notes afterwards, on the train journey back.

My observant participation in the local Transition group primarily involved attending regular 'hub' meetings: monthly evening meetings in which active and coordinating members of the group would meet to feedback on projects, carry out general group business (such as compiling a constitution), and group decision making (which like CCA involved consensus decision making i.e. arriving at decisions via discussion). The group itself consisted of several sub-groups which were coordinated and brought together by the 'hub'. Initially there were only a couple of sub-groups, one concerned with developing local food and the other with developing local renewable energy. Gradually over the course of my involvement these sub-groups increased, as the overall membership and active membership of the group increased, so that eventually these groups included both the original sub-groups but additionally groups concerned with: the economy, housing, outreach, research, transport, and branching out from the originally food group a group concerned specifically with developing local fruit projects. The hub meetings initially took place in a church hall, which was largely used as Steiner Nursery, but once the church was forced to sell its hall for financial reasons the meetings moved to a community association's café space. Later on in my involvement the group rented office space at the community association and meetings then took place in the group's office. Again like the previous case study, I tried to participate much like any other member of the group, and took notes following meetings and events so as not make members feel spied on or hinder my participation. Although unlike the previous case study I did not take photos during this case study, this was largely because I did not want to disrupt meetings and to keep participants anonymous. This lack of photography also reflected the way in which my identity so often blurred

between being just another member of the group and a researcher. This blurring was reinforced by the longer period of my involvement and the less clearly defined nature of my fieldwork, especially in comparison with the other case studies where I was generally attending a particular event for a particular period of time. Themes also took longer to emerge and develop because of this blurring and because the time-scale of my involvement was more open ended.

As part of my observant participation with the Transition group I also recorded one of the Transition meetings, using the digital voice recording device I used to record my interviews, this was so that I would have some sort of snapshot and sample of a meeting to explore in more depth. After I had asked permission to record the meeting I found that it seemed easy for the group, and myself, to forget the device was there in a way which would have been more difficult with a video camera. It seemed to fade into the background. I decided to record a meeting once I had been involved in the group for a while, and this seemed to make the process easier as everyone at that point already knew I was a researcher. Although I did get a sense that group members thought there would not be much to gain from recording a meeting, and at the time I too was unsure whether it would prove useful. However it did prove useful, partly because it demonstrated practices I had already noticed within the meeting habits of the group, namely the use of humour to enliven meetings. It also enabled me to tell the story of a particular meeting in more detail, using the recording and my notes, and this story forms one of the immersive narratives in the empirical chapters to follow.

Alongside the hub meetings I attended and helped on associated events of the group such as outreach stalls, film showings, group visioning workshops, and group social events. My main sub-group involvement was through the outreach and research group, which included helping to organise a week-long event in which the group took over a vacant high street shop to gather locals' ideas for the initial stages of their EDAP. This week-long shop event was also for the purposes of general outreach around the issues of climate change and peak oil, and raising local awareness the group itself, of their existence and activities. Following this event, and the departure of a couple of key active members, I began to coordinate the outreach communication which largely involved maintaining the group's outreach email i.e. checking and answering emails, and

developing and distributing a newsletter. Additionally, towards the end of my research I became involved with a participatory action research project, with an academic member of the group, in which we held a series of community engagement events as part of the development of the group's EDAP. I will now turn to my participation in the final case study.

At Lammas my observant participation involved the volunteering opportunities offered by the project. The regular influx of volunteers at Lammas provides extra labour for the building work, which would otherwise be carried out solely by residents. However, like the project more generally the physical help provided by volunteering is only part of its purpose, the main purpose being to encourage low-impact living and provide training in low-impact building techniques. Some volunteers come on volunteer weeks which are described as 'experience weeks', where they are able to try out different low-impact building techniques by helping on different resident's plots, as well as experience low-impact living by living on the site for a week. Others volunteer on the site for longer periods (i.e. weeks/months) and live on a particular family's plot either in a tent/yurt or a caravan, these are often, but not always, those who have already been to the eco-village on volunteer weeks or already have a connection to a resident in the eco-village. In exchange for their labour volunteers are provided with meals, but those who attend an experience week pay for their food costs. I chose to undertake both forms of volunteering at the eco-village: first attending a volunteer experience week in July 2010 and then volunteering on a family's plot for a week in September 2010.

My observant participation at the volunteer experience week involved staying in the farmhouse on the site and eating meals here with the other volunteers, working with the rest of the volunteers on the first day, fixing cracks in a water channel, and the last day, helping to clear felled trees in the woodland. Like the other volunteers, for the rest of the week I was rotated around the site, helping on individual family's plots with specific tasks such as moving materials around the plot, stripping bark off tree trunks, weeding, and helping to build a wooden porch for one family's static caravan. There were also social events organised each evening including: socialising around a campfire or the fireplace in the farmhouse, attending an evening talk in a nearby village followed by a local pub, story-telling, a film-night, and a night of dancing and music on the last

night. Again like the climate camp, I would write up my notes before going to sleep because the days were too busy to stop and write and this also felt a natural time. I took limited photos, partly due to the busyness of the week and the volunteering work, and not always having my camera on me, but also one of the volunteers was a avid photographer and allowed me use their photographs in my research.

My observant participation for my second Lammas visit, volunteering on a family's plot for a week, again involved me trying to participate much like any other volunteer. I stayed in a tent on the family's plot and ate my meals with them in one of their caravans which functioned as the family's living space. At first I was the only volunteer on the family's plot and during the first couple of days I carried out liming (which is similar to plastering but involving more natural materials) inside the barn the family were building, and helped transport wooden planks from the wood cutting area near the entrance to the eco-village to the family's plot (loading them onto a trailer and then unloading them at the family's plot). After a couple of days another volunteer arrived who was helping with the cooking for the experience week the following week, and they began to help with the liming. I spent the rest of the week lathing (sawing up and nailing long thin strips of wood in horizontal rows with small gaps in between for the lime to cling to) the outside of the barn on some scaffolding. The evenings were spent socialising with the family and the other volunteer, and one evening we babysat for the couple so that they could go out. The weekend at the end of the week was spent more leisurely, as this was considered volunteers time off, including washing my hair for the first time that week. On this visit I took frequent photos, largely at the weekend when I had more time, my photos here were exclusively of the space of the plot and the more-than-human elements of the site. My notes were, as usual, made at night, and at the weekend I tried to draw out and develop the themes which emerged in more depth.

The immersive observant participation approach described above has both strengths and limitations which I shall now turn to. Firstly, such an immersive approach comes with 'side effects', as Dewsbury notes, namely "making us more vulnerable and self-reflexive...One difficulty is that this methodological engagement really does expose the body to, or in, us." (Dewsbury, 2010: 328). In using our own bodies as recording devices there is a

danger in not taking care in the way we would with research participants, such as worrying that they are happy and comfortable with your presence or line of questioning. In other words de-humanising ourselves and being hard(er) on ourselves when our bodies do not act or perform in the way we expected or planned. It is this difficulty, among others, which I shall now reflect on.

The experiences in the field were coloured by three key things. Firstly my position as a researcher, which I could never fully separate myself from, and which some activists I encountered it seemed too could not. This feeling was reinforced by moments which highlighted my role as ‘other’ and not-quite-an-activist. For example, one transition group member often joked when introducing me that I was ‘researching them’, though meant in a light hearted way it reinforced me as an outsider and not-quite or not-yet part of the group. It also seemed to draw attention to the fact that I was doing the ‘wrong’ kind of research, that is, research that was not PAR. However, primarily this feeling was connected to me not taking into account or taking seriously the impact my own feelings could have on the research experience, and thus not allowing myself time to settle into the different spaces and forms of activism. Secondly, and linked to the previous point, the fact that my past experiences of activism were largely campaign based as opposed to more ‘direct’ forms, and the associations I had already with direct action: fear, danger etc. Finally, and I would argue most importantly, the fact that the state of being ‘energised’, i.e. ‘full’ of or bursting with ‘energy’, is idealised, especially within activism. This was connected to the way in which I initially conceived of ‘energy’, namely as a tangible human property. This meant that much of the time I expected to be ‘energised’ by the activism I took part in and this high expectation was easily disappointed.

Just as I could never truly separate my role as a ‘researcher’, by considering myself as first and foremost a ‘researcher’ I assumed a thicker skin and greater confidence than my ‘normal’ self. As researchers we are often concerned with the ease and comfort of our participants and building up their trust, however we rarely apply these concerns to our own well-being and realise that as a researchers we are not a heightened or ‘super’ versions of ourselves. The climate camp experience, for example, would have been very different if I had developed a relationship with a group going to the camp beforehand, rather than suddenly thrusting myself into this relatively alien space. I did not have

enough foresight as to the impact my own position and feelings would have on my experience of the fieldwork. This lack of foresight of course follows in a long line of ingrained thinking, despite the emergence of emotional and affective geographies, that my feelings do not matter and are not relevant to the research. While, with a non-representational and affective stance I was interested in my experiences *in the field* I did not take into account the affective angle from which I would *approach the field*. Though this not-quite-at-ease stance does add an interesting dimension in the context of energy, and it is too simplistic to assume that my energetic experiences would have been more positive had I been more settled in to these spaces. The point is more that I may have been more open to the experiences and therefore the energy dynamics at play had I been more settled in these spaces. Although sometimes being too close too and submerged in something can make it difficult to see the bigger picture, patterns and themes i.e. not being able to see the wood for the trees. Therefore while in some ways our own bodies can impose limitations on our research, such as the affective baggage our bodies come with and the way this baggage can limit our level of participation, becoming too submerged and too much of a participant rather than a researcher/participant can have its own drawbacks.

This in some way means that the empirical work developed from the above experiences is ultimately one of *my* energies of activism. I tried to counter the potential problem this posed, of being too self-indulgent or ‘navel gazing’, by only including as much of my experiences, thoughts, and feelings which felt relevant, both in my notes and in the final form my empirical material took: the immerse narratives I composed. However, arguably, and as Summers-Effler highlights, the experiences of the ethnography are not dissimilar to that of the new activist: “The ethnographer’s journey of intimacy within their sites is not so different from other newcomers” (Summers-Effler, 2010: 203). The immersive narratives in the empirical chapters to follow may paint a negative picture of the fieldwork experiences, but this is not the intention, rather the intention is to honestly portray the experiences even if these were uncomfortable and not what was expected. Through both my academic and activist readings I had built activism up as an energetic and energy enhancing practice, and this expectation was easily disappointed. My energetically angled readings of academic activism literature had led me to energy enhancing discussions of activism: the

carnivalesque, the fun, and playful. Equally activist texts I encountered were full of messages of hope, and empowerment, and coming together to definitely create the 'change' and new 'world' we want to see. Therefore my experiences often countered ingrained assumption that activism is an overall exciting and energy producing practice. As Summers-Effler's (2010) work shows, and as I found as I became further immersed in the activism of the Transition group, activism can become more energetically draining the more settled within a group and within a particular form of activism you become, not less. This is perhaps obvious as you put more of your heart and soul into a 'cause' or 'outcome', and therefore when it 'fails' or your expectations are not met this can be hugely draining. This intensity of experience can then be present both in the initial and more established stages of activism. And these early stages of activism are arguably no less 'proper' or 'true' experiences of activism, and no less important than the more established forms. Each space was in itself a mix of both established and new activist, and this mix was in itself important, the newer learning energetic lessons from the older, and the new 'blood' injecting new life and energy into the space. It is therefore problematic to view the research here as an inauthentic activist account as this reproduces activist hierarchies, the privileging of the 'activist' identity, and the discourse of academics as never truly 'proper' or 'real' activists. Therefore, the apparent limitations of my methodological approach were equally strengths, as they often illuminated my own and broader assumptions.

While the discussion so far has focused on the use of observant participation I will now turn my discussion to the interviews. In the interviews I was interested in the interviewees' personal activist narratives, in particular the beginnings of their activism. I was also interested in what activists perceived as energetic highs and lows in their activism, this was at a stage in my research when I was stuck in a rather simplistic scalar view of energy as highs and lows, enhancements and depletions. Despite this simplifying of energy, such questions still contributed useful insights, especially as they provided easy tools and phrases for talking about and starting discussions of 'energy'. Prior to the fieldwork I had no fixed number of interviews in mind for each site, especially as I was favouring an observant participation approach, I therefore undertook interviews when they felt appropriate and opportunities presented themselves. I

carried out interviews, both recorded (using a digital voice recorder) and unrecorded (taking notes instead) within each case study, as there were instances where activists did not wish to be recorded. The transcripts of the recorded interviews can be found in the appendices section at the end of the thesis.

My first interviews took place at the Climate Camp, first with an activist from my neighbourhood at the camp, who was taking a break from a game of frisbee in the communal neighbourhood tent (North West/North East neighbourhood) and I therefore saw this as an opportunity to interview an activist without interrupting their activism. Secondly, I again interviewed an activist from my neighbourhood, who I again met and interviewed in the communal neighbourhood tent. Thirdly, I interviewed an activist from another neighbourhood who I had got talking to, and again this interview took place in the communal tent of my neighbourhood. My final interview of the climate camp was with a wellbeing volunteer at the camp who I had met in a workshop, this was the only of the four interviews there which was properly arranged (at the workshop and arranging to meet them later when they were free) rather than a spur of the moment opportunity like the previous interviews where interviews took place immediately after asking them. I had sought out a wellbeing volunteer as I was particularly interested in the well-being space of the camp, this was because of its explicit energy implications as a place of energy depletion (e.g. burnout) and 're-energising'.

Following the Climate Camp I attended Mainshill solidarity camp in Scotland, where I carried out a brief interview with one of the activists. At Mainshill I happened to meet a member of a local (North-East) climate change activist group, a group which had begun as a local wing of CCA, and they informed me of a meeting they were having the following week. At this meeting I met another local climate change activist, an activist who had been involved in the setting up of the Mainshill camp. Shortly after the meeting this activist then allowed me to come to their low-impact home to interview them, their home was low-impact in that it was a wooden chalet style house with a wood burning stove, had a compost toilet, and a small wind turbine (like those I had encountered at the climate camp) in their front garden which provided them with their electricity. The activist and their family were extremely kind to me; I arrived late having had trouble finding their home, and they cooked me dinner and got a

neighbour to give me a lift to the train station after the interview. This interview then involved being, quite literally, temporarily immersed in their activist world.

After attending the Climate Swoop, the direct action event associated with the 2009 Climate Camp, I interviewed the two activists I had accompanied, both about their experiences at the Climate Swoop and the Climate Camp (which they had also both attended, though I had not met them at the camp). I had not interviewed them at the Swoop because I wanted to have their reflections on the event and therefore needed to interview them post-swoop. Additionally, there would not have been a chance during the swoop because of the nature of the event, and I would have felt that I was taking time away from the doing of their activism.

My final CCA interview was at the Trafalgar Square Climate Camp, in the communal tent of the camp. The activist was happy to be interviewed, and even did not mind whether or not they were made anonymous, which was a first for me, and made us both a cup of tea for the interview. The interview was quite poorly timed on my part as they were preparing for an action later that day and trying to manage the other group members present in the tent: a large number of the camp and the group in the tent were homeless people some of which obviously had mental health issues and the camp and activist had had to take on the role of caring for these people. With this interview I felt, on reflection, that I was draining their activist time, and this was an instance where an interview which involved doing something (as Anderson's walking interviews implicitly suggest), like helping them prepare, would have been a more ethical approach. While at times interviews seem to benefit activists, even if in a small way, by encouraging them to reflect on aspects of their activism, at other times, like the end of this interview, I felt (on reflection) that I was draining activists' time and energy. This experience, in part, contributed to my reduction in interviews as a method in the other case studies.

As part of the Transition example I interviewed three of the group members. These took place after I had already been involved with the group roughly a year. In some ways these would have functioned better if I had carried them out earlier in my involvement, as each interview I found enabled me to get to know better these group members. All of the interviews were with group members who were actively involved, and had been involved in the group from

the beginning. The first interview I carried out took place in the group's original meeting space, the church hall which was used mostly as a Steiner nursery, the second in a local café which made for a difficult recording but aided the informal feel of the interview. The final interview took place in the new meeting space of the group: the café space of a local community association.

At the Lammas eco-village I carried out three interviews as well, two during the 'volunteer experience week' and one with one of my hosts during my week volunteering on a family's plot. One of the volunteers on the experience week was also a researcher, we therefore decided to carry out our interviews together to save the residents the time and energy cost by having separate interviews. On the last working day of the experience week we therefore interviewed one resident on their plot in one of their buildings in progress, interviewing in this way (with two interviewers) seem to make for a more social and lively interview. We took it turns to ask questions, as we were interested in different things, but our differing questions allowed us to build up a fuller interview. The second interview we carried out in the loft of the Farmhouse, with a resident who had been a volunteer on the previous experience week. The interview I carried out during my second Lammas visit was with one of my hosts, having interviewed my other host at the experience week (the first interview), this took place in the family's main caravan during one of my final evenings. The interview being in the evening and therefore by candle light (they did not have electric lighting in that caravan), gave a more intimate and immersive feel to the interview. I will now reflect on the overall practice and process of this method, as well as its strengths and limitations, and how I attempted to counter these limitations.

On returning from the field a major concern of mine was that I did not have enough 'data' to convey the 'energies of activism'. This was until I realised the richness of a photograph, a conversation recording, an activist leaflet etc. At the Climate Camp to some extent my desire to accumulate 'proper' data (making notes of my own experiences rarely felt like proper data) in the form of interview transcripts sometimes hindered my level of participation, for example I was often at the Climate Camp looking for interviewees rather than experiences of the camp. The need to look for interviewees and be a 'serious' researcher (by collecting 'proper' data) could often be used as a cover or excuse to myself for

avoiding a fuller immersion and participation in the field. However this changed as my fieldwork progressed, for example during my time at the eco-village interviews became something to do at the end before I left, almost as an afterthought: “I’m going tomorrow/the day after, maybe I should do some interviews”, or, in other words, after as opposed to during participation. This shift in emphasis from interviews to observant participation, resulted from my growing frustration with interviews as a methodology for this subject matter (the energies of activism), but also a growing confidence in participation as a method and in my own abilities as a researcher.

This shift is reflected in the number of interviews I carried out for each case study: I carried out a total of eight interviews in relation to my initial CCA case study, three in relation to the Transition group, and three in relation to my final case study of Lammas. I also changed the way I approached the interview data. With my initial interviews I would transcribe them shortly after undertaking them and then work from the transcripts in terms of analysis, re-reading them to look for emerging themes and themes I had encountered in my observant participation. But as time progressed I began to re-listen to, rather than simply re-read, interviews. This was because the recordings seemed to capture more of the life and expression of the interviews, while the transcripts seem lifeless. I reproduced this practice with the Transition meeting I recorded, in that during my analysis I would re-listen to the meeting. I would argue that this process of re-listening to recordings, of interviews or fieldwork, can re-immense a researcher in the field in a way which it is harder for transcriptions to do, and can create the ‘lightening rod’ moments to which Dewsbury (2010) refers. This immersive approach therefore carried through to the analysis process, in that I frequently tried to re-immense myself in the field in order to analyse my experiences. The process of writing narratives was as much about re-immersing myself in the field as it was an attempt to immerse the reader.

The interviews though useful did to some extent create an artificial situation, and energy I found was a difficult thing to sit down and discuss in an abstract manner. Similarly in the context of non-representational research Pile (2010) writes: “asking people to communicate their feelings will only solicit a kind of affective false consciousness, where the ‘client’ rehearses crass caricatures of what they actually feel.” (2010: 9). Although, interviews are useful

in more than what is said, as the process of re-listening to interviews showed. Interviews can offer much more than statements and descriptions, they can offer energies, affects, and virtual presences of their own. From the beginning I found that energy was not easy to talk about, either for me to ask about and articulate or for activists themselves to describe, and there was always the unanswered question hanging in the air for my part at least: are we talking about the same kind of 'energy'? In the context of this research, rather than being accurate descriptions of the energies of their activism and the energies of activist spaces, interviews were intensive moments and encounters, encounters of energetic contagion and containment and thus intensity, in themselves. Therefore the researcher is always using their body as a tool both in the 'natural' space of the field and in the 'artificial' space of the interview. Therefore, in the context of this research the key difficulty in relation to interviews, though one which I did not arrive at a solution, is how to attempt to capture and convey all of the interview, i.e. not simply what is said. One possible solution may be to take a route similar to that which I took with the recorded Transition meeting, which was to combine the recording with observant participation notes to create a fuller narrative. Therefore, in the empirical chapters to follow I use interview extracts to reinforce the analysis of my observant participation (written up into immersive narratives) rather than as separate data to analyse independently.

Additionally, I found that interviews could become theoretical discussion, without explicitly intending them to be as such. As I discussed at the beginning of the chapter much activism research within geography tends to be participatory, it is assumed that non-representational research cannot be participatory which seems rather patronising as though non-academics cannot possibly understand, let alone contribute to academic theory such as non-representational theory. This at least was my assumption on approaching this research. Yet I found in my interviews with activists that we would frequently talk about or around theory without identifying it as such or realising. Such interviews often taught me as much about theory, and my own assumptions, as the literature.

The choice of presentation, both of the observant participation and interview material, was not something considered here until after the fieldwork was complete. A new methodological obstacle is approached on returning from the field with my scribbled notes, photographs, interview recordings and various

artefacts (e.g. flyers and feathers): how can all these *remnants* of the field be somehow brought together to *convey* the field? Though from a non-representational approach a researcher knows they cannot hope to 'live up to' the field there is still the wish to try, to try to convey it as best we can. Traditionally such remnants have been used as evidence in themselves but my methodological reading inspired me to use these remnants not as the *full story* in themselves but rather as *tools to construct stories*. Using such remnants then as things which could return me to the field in order to write in-depth narratives of my experiences, much like Jon Anderson's (2004) walking interviews in which the surrounding space as it is moved through can activate memory. My method for choosing which stories to tell involved several criteria, some academic, some less academic. Firstly, from a more logical academic perspective, I tried to chose experiences which demonstrated well particular themes which had reoccurred, but also experiences for which my notes were the richest and most detailed and for which I had additionally material (such as substantial photographs). My field notes, and therefore my observant participation, formed the majority of the remnants of the field from which I drew to write the narratives. Secondly, and from a less academic perspective, I chose experiences for which I had the most vivid memories of and which stood out more prominently in my memory of the fieldwork. These criteria combined to make the process of writing stories about the fieldwork flow quite naturally. The immersive narratives which I produced, and which will compose the empirical chapters to follow, therefore added an extra layer of immersion and analysis to my methodology. In the next and final section of this chapter I will reflect on the ethical challenges of my methodological practice.

### **Ethics in the field: ethics in activism research**

Ethics were obviously a key methodological concern right from the onset, the project requiring and obtaining ethical clearance before it could it begin, and an issue which cut across all stages of the methodological process. There were of course broader methodological concerns which accompany researching activism, activism as a practice often puts activists in precarious and dangerous situations and often involves them needing to hide their identity. Additionally, as activist

researchers we want to research in a way which supports rather than compromises activist practices.

Each methodological practice came with its own ethical concerns and considerations. The reasoning behind my choice of observant participation as a method was partly an ethical one, the idea being that I could contribute to the activism at hand through participation and therefore contribute something back in exchange for: the time given by the research participants, and being allowed to attend and partake in these activist spaces and practices. At the direct action fieldwork this participation was often only simply in the form of being at and occupying the space with the other activists, and increasing the overall numbers at the camp or action, as well as through helping out directly with practical chores such as the washing up at the climate camp. As my involvement in the other case studies was longer I often felt that my participation and contribution needed to be more substantial. I felt this especially acutely at the eco-village where the other volunteers and I were fed and looked after like members of the eco-villagers' families. I therefore wanted my contribution as a volunteer to be worthwhile and to make a tangible difference to the resident's building processes, and this frustration is especially evident in my narrative in Chapter 6.

In addition to participating in activism, and seeking to contribute to activism through my participation, my observant participation also involved more observation orientated practices, namely photography. Therefore some of my initial concerns related to my use of photography, both in terms of not wanting to reveal activists identities and the practical difficulties of gaining permissions from activists. I initially planned to carry out some filming in my fieldwork, for non-representational reasons, namely, the difficulty of portraying the practice of activism through description and static photographs. However, once reflecting on using filming as a method I decided against it due to the intrusiveness of the method and its potential for disrupting the activism at hand. Additionally, such a method could disrupt my participation in the activism: distancing myself further from the practice by being behind a camera lens and skewing my observant participation more towards observation. There were also practical reasons which made filming unsuitable in this research context, such as the time constraints caused by multiple case studies, such a practice needed greater time to establish trust within a group, alongside other problematics such

as the difficulties of obtaining permissions. In the field, even photography proved problematic, especially in the case of the climate camp where the site seemed to be in constant motion and therefore permissions were difficult to obtain. To counter this problem at my initial field site of the Climate Camp, and taking into account my awareness that many direct action activists valued their identity being concealed, I decided to simply take photos of the space of the camp itself and it was therefore through this very ethical issue which the importance of the more-than-human in activism emerged.

In relation to the interviews, as discussed in the previous section, I tried to carry out interviews without disrupting the practice of their activism, and therefore often timed them at moments in which activists were free or taking a break. Before beginning each interview I would explain: who I was and what my research was about, that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to, could provide as long or as a short an answer, and that all the answers would be made anonymous. As well as being ethically necessary this procedure often seemed to put people more at ease, although to others it seemed stating the obvious (e.g. telling them that they did not have to answer a question if they did not want to). However I still felt it was necessary to set interviews up this way and following perceiving this obviousness from some activists, in the interviews that followed I would say “*obviously* you don’t have to answer questions that you don’t want to...” in the hope that this would prevent them from feeling that I was insulting their intelligence.

Additionally, each field site was accompanied by different ethical issues and solutions. Before beginning each fieldwork I would always contact the group concerned to obtain permission, by emailing the contacts for each group. In the case of the CCA fieldwork I used the contacts on their web pages, for the Transition group I already had contacts for the group having already joined the group out of personal interest, and again for Lammas I already had contacts through the previous research I had carried out. However, at many of the direct action events I attended I was often unintentionally covert as it was only those I spoke directly to and interviewed who I explained that I was a researcher, and this is a difficult problem to get around at large direct action events. One potential solution could have been to have my university ID card clearly displayed. Although this solution may have further hindered my participation as I

often felt I was either a researcher or an activist and found it difficult to hold a dual identity, and this difficulty would have been further exaggerated by my researcher identity being permanently on display. Alternately, in my fieldwork at Lammas, and my ongoing research with the Transition group, it was much easier to be overt. The Lammas residents, having met me before, already knew me as a researcher, and a small group of residents and volunteers meant that it was easy to explain that I was a researcher and what my research involved. Similarly at the Transition meetings and within the Transition group it was easy to explain my position, and meetings would always begin with a go-round in which I could explain that I was a researcher as well as a group member. Clearly, then the ethical issue of being overt or (unintentionally) covert is as much about time scale of involvement and group size, as it is about the specific dynamics of the spaces of the fieldwork.

The final point I wish to make in relation to ethics concerns the presentation of my empirical material, as narratives, and the dominance of the observant participation method and empirical material. These choices were partly ethical, as well as epistemological, it felt more ethical to try to convey my experiences and feelings than those of my research participants. This ethical aspect was especially as I had chosen an approach which was not explicitly participatory, and therefore I was not in direct dialogue with my research participants on the presentation and interpretation of the research material. This in some ways brings us full circle as it was this assumption, that my research could not take this approach and could not be directly participatory, which demonstrates the ingrained methodological assumptions of more-than-representational, affective, and more-than-human research.

## **Conclusions**

The methodology here evolved over the course of approaching, being in, and reflecting on the field experiences, rather than a straightforward clear separation between deciding on methodology, doing methods, and analysing the ‘findings’. I favoured an immersive, in-depth, detailed, and accumulative (both literally and figuratively accumulating remnants of the field) process throughout. But it was only during the struggles of ‘analysis’ that I decided on an autobiographical

narrative approach of presentation. This mode of presentation added another and unexpected layer to the ‘analysis’ process returning me to the field in the process of writing, reading, and reflecting on these narratives. Therefore here boundaries blurred between method and analysis, and approaching, reflecting, and presenting the field equally blurred and looped. Therefore our methodology need not be fixed and unchangeable before we approach the field, but rather should be open to the methodological lessons the field itself can teach us. We should also shift the focus from what our research *is* doing, rather than what it is *not*, even if these are not what we originally intended.

The methodological process and experience here additionally hinted at broader considerations. Non-representable is not to say that such matter is not worth researching, and by trying to convey our empirical experiences we engage with our empirical world, which is after all what research is ultimately about: engaging with the world, and finding “ways of *living with* the real” (Dewsbury, 2010). If “the world does not resolve or come to rest”<sup>7</sup> then neither should our methodology, rather we should instead keep trying, and keeping failing, preferably failing “less worse”<sup>8</sup> than before. Additionally if the world does not “come to rest” neither does our method *need* to, if we are presenting a fixed finite representation through our research then arguably we are not actually reflecting the world, we are simplifying and purifying. So rather than attempting to cover up or get around this provisional nature it is about embracing it because how can we express a messy and excess world apart from with such a method:

If this is an awful mess...then would something less messy make a mess of describing it?...what happens when social science tries to describe things that are complex, diffuse and messy. The answer, I will argue, is that it tends to make a mess of it. This is because simple clear descriptions don’t work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent. (Law, 2004: 2)

The energies of activism are one example of a messy and complex phenomenon to research, because such energies can never been fully known or

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<sup>7</sup> (Beckett, 1987: 19, quoted in Dewsbury et al, 2002: 437)

<sup>8</sup> (Dewsbury, 2010: 322)

grasped. Here then the fieldwork is assembled into patchwork partial narratives composed of moments, memories, objects, photographs, leaflets, snippets of recordings, and scribbled notes. It is therefore to the mess itself which I will now turn.

**Chapter 5**  
**Spaces of Activism:**  
**Spatial arrangements of the Climate Camp**

We will keep *taking spaces*<sup>1</sup>

By *taking* and *making* their own political space at Twyford Down<sup>2</sup>, EDA [Environmental Direct Action] can be seen as directly engaging with the UK state in a struggle for political space

(J. Anderson, 2004a: 117, my emphasis)

Present in both the above quotes, one from an activist and one from an academic, are two implicit assumptions concerning the act of activism and the role of space in activism. Firstly the assumptions of activist agency introduced and outlined in the theoretical chapters are very much present here, namely activism as an intentional direct act (directly *taking* and *remaking* space) enacted by a human actor. Indeed space allows for the best window through which to begin to explore this assumption, as linked to this is the second implicit assumption of space as ultimately passive in the act of activism: either as a stage for the act of activism and/or a thing to take, take over, or take back. Within this second assumption is a particular conception of space as a coherent whole, which can be fully taken. Additionally, taking and making, in this context, implies that previously the space was somehow fully formed, stable, and finished, and especially in the case of Anderson's 'making' space is implied as a (passive) blank canvas for human agency. All three assumptions are obviously linked, where the agency of the human activist is privileged other aspects inevitably take a lesser role in the overall agency of activism, this privileging is also enabled further when space is considered a passive coherent whole.

When space is considered the stage for activism, the site at which activism takes place in its most explosive and mundane manifestations, or

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<sup>1</sup> Interview extract with activist at Trafalgar Square Climate Camp: COP OUT CAMP OUT (Appendix E, my emphasis)

<sup>2</sup> First space of contention in the road protest movement.

equally as things to claim or occupy, the overwhelming importance is placed on its *place* i.e. the location of activism. Whether this place is a foreign embassy, such as the CCA protests at the Canadian (in relation to the Tar Sands<sup>3</sup>) and Danish embassy during the 2009 Copenhagen Climate talks, or the fence of a power station in the case of the Climate Swoop, the place is considered to the detriment of the *arrangement of space* at the site of activism. This is not to say that the place of activism is not important. Often sites are chosen for their symbolic value and/or the close contact and interaction they enable with the ‘enemy’ or opposition, and spaces are sometimes the source of contention in themselves. However, equally important, yet often overlooked, are the arrangements which occur at these sites.

Anderson (2004a) does not wish to propose a passive role of space in the act of activism, arguing that such spaces are “*not* passive stages on which actions occur” (255, my emphasis) but “rather they are the medium *that impinge on, structure and facilitate* these processes...Places then, are not only a medium but also an outcome of action, producing and being produced through human practice.”(*ibid*, my emphasis). From Anderson’s perspective spaces can “impinge on, structure and facilitate” activism, their agency is therefore always *secondary* to that of the activist, and important only in so far as they hinder or help acts of activism. This of course reflects a broader tendency within activism literature to favour and privilege the agency of the human actor. In contrast Jullien’s (1995) ‘propensity of things’ positions human agency as *one* among many elements contributing to the potential for action. Using the example of military strategy in ancient China he argues that the “lay of the land” and “whether the climate is favourable or unfavourable” are as “equally important” to the overall disposition as the (perceived) physical and emotional energy levels of the troops: “whether they are enthusiastic or dispirited... whether the troops are well organised or scattered, in good shape or exhausted” (Jullien, 1995: 28):

Whatever the factors involved, the situation can, and must, exert its coercive effect in two ways: positively, by encouraging the troops to invest all their energy in the offensive, and negatively, by sapping the

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<sup>3</sup> A highly polluting and destructive oil extraction program in Canada which has attracted activist attention, especially because of the social justice (its effects on indigenous people)

enemy troops of all initiative and reducing them to passivity. Because of *shi*, they will not be in a position to resist, no matter how numerous. Mere numerical advantage gives way before these superior, more decisive conditions. (*ibid*)

Such conditions for action can, as Jullien writes, combine to form “superior” and “more decisive conditions” rather than human factors typically considered superior factors such as “numerical advantage”. Therefore, multiple elements, such as those Jullien outlines above, together form a particular “arrangement” or “spatio-temporal configuration”:

*Shi* is the style, energy, propensity, trajectory, or élan inherent to a specific *arrangement of things*. Originally a word used in military strategy, *shi* emerged in the description of a good general who must be able to read and then ride the *shi* of a configuration of moods, winds, historical trends, and armaments: *shi* names the dynamic force emanating from a spatio-temporal configuration rather than from any particular element within it. (Bennett, 2010: 35, second emphasis mine)

As Bennett argues above, arrangements can have their own energy, or potential for action, which is more-than simply the energy of the elements combined. It is more-than simply that human activists interact with space, where space is imagined as a separate and coherent thing, but rather activists are themselves part of such arrangements. The contention here then in this chapter is more-than simply space and action have a two way relation, and that space can ‘produce’ and be ‘produced’ by action as Anderson suggests. But further that space is an *equal* actor in activism rather than simply a medium or secondary element which can “impinge on, structure and facilitate” the “process” of activism, instead space here is part of the very process of the act of activism. Rather than conceiving of space as a coherent unified whole which the term often invites, here ‘space’ is used as a collective term to refer to the macro and micro arrangements of a multitude of different elements, things, odds and ends, which are typically considered in the background of activism, an understanding which draws on assemblage literature (e.g. Bennett, 2010; Latour, 2005). These

different elements which make up ‘spaces’ e.g. structures, furniture, objects, smells, sights, sounds, textures, temperatures etc., along with the human and non-human beings, can come together to form particular energetic dispositions or arrangements. Such arrangements can involve an aligning of elements in order to form the conditions for action, or conversely a mis-aligning of elements which form conditions that limit and discourage action. Such aligning or misaligning is never completely intentional, and even where such arrangements or elements are steered in a particular direction, unintended and unexpected outcomes can still occur.

As Bennett (2010) writes an actor “never really acts alone”: “an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces” (21). Therefore this chapter seeks to unearth some of the other actors at work in the act of activism. The things, clutter, and non-human have an agency in activism, but furthermore particular arrangements have agencies and are actors. While the place of activism is often important, equally important yet often overlooked is the arrangement of space at the place of activism. Therefore, activism does not *take* and *remake* spaces but rather enters into, often unknowingly and unintentionally, new relations with and negotiations with ‘space’.

The empirical focus here will be on the first activist space which was encountered in this research, the 2009 Climate Camp at Blackheath, London. The selection of this fieldwork site is not meant to position it as the most important, although that is not to say that this site or the examples were chosen at random, but rather it was singled out for several reasons. The first and main being that the fieldwork discussed here was the first to be carried out and therefore this is the site where the ideas developed from and continuously return to. Additionally, this choice of focus, on a very particular spatial and temporal frame, allows for a more in-depth discussion to be developed. There will still be discussions and connections made between the other two case studies, as similar spatial and temporal arrangements occurred in these other examples, as I shall discuss. It

seems appropriate then to begin not only where the journey or story<sup>4</sup> of this research began, but also where the ideas and themes sprung and radiated out from. For example, it was through this space that I realised that activist spaces are immensely cluttered spaces, even those which are relatively temporary, and this clutter illuminated the multiple actors involved in activism. The site of the camp also provides the unique opportunity to explore the initial process of arrangement of space here, as well as the arrangements involved in the maintenance of the camp.

As outlined in the previous chapter the choice of presentation of the fieldwork will be through story-telling. Each of the following three sections will introduce the particular aspect of the camp with which it is concerned, followed by a descriptive narrative developed using the fieldwork notes, photos and other remnants (including the camp handbook) of the fieldwork, and then an analysis of the narrative. The intention here with this choice of presentation style is to *attempt* to immerse the reader in the chosen examples and empirical space. The first section below is concerned with the process of the camp's set up, the second section will focus on the 'wellbeing space' of the camp, and then finally the third section will explore the daily 'neighbourhood' meetings. The overall focus here is on demonstrating the way in which seemingly passive elements of 'space' are not passive and do things as well. Additionally that the human activists are not separate from and operating on/in spaces, they are a part of them, and part of its arrangement as well as its arranging. The overall argument will be one of greater consideration to the role of the more-than-human in the activist project and activist energies, a central argument of the thesis as a whole but one which will be introduced here.

### **Setting up Camp**

This section will explore the initial process of 'taking' and 'making' of the space for the camp, a process which involved months of prior planning by the working groups including selecting possible sites and organising equipment for the camp. Only a few in the group were made aware of the chosen site for the camp to

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<sup>4</sup> By which I mean the empirical or fieldwork journey of this particular research, as obviously the journey of this research more broadly can be traced back much further.

prevent this knowledge from leaking out into unwanted sources (namely the police), while this secretive aspect enabled the taking of the site with little hindrance<sup>5</sup> it also had unintended consequences for the experience of ‘taking’ of the site, as I shall discuss below. The process of ‘taking’ and ‘making’ the site was organised geographically: activists assigned themselves to a ‘swoop group’ based on where they were from in the UK (e.g. North East) with whom they would ‘swoop’ onto and help claim the site, and then the camp itself was divided into similar neighbourhoods (e.g. North East/West, South, Wales etc). So while on first glance the Climate Camp appeared a random and disordered mass of tents, on closer inspection, and in conjunction with the site plan, an order and arrangement of the space was clearly visible. This order was designed to serve several purposes: it facilitated the smooth running of the camp by neatly dividing up sleeping and eating arrangements by neighbourhoods, it presented a positive impression to outsiders (e.g. visitors, journalists, police, and politicians) of a well organised movement, it created a sense of potential success, as well as a miniature model of what is possible. But this order and arrangement of the space needed to be established, it was not entirely pre-determined or only in a loose and vague sense, and how exactly it was established was dependent on ‘the lay of the land’ on arrival, as well as the activists who came and their energy levels on arrival.

### **Swooping onto the Camp**

We had travelled all night to get to London and eventually found the meeting point of our group, the Pink group, with our poorly printed Google maps. It was not much of a group to begin with, only four people, not including ourselves, tightly bunched onto a bench. We were slightly disheartened at first, all this way, all this waiting and sleep lost for such a poor turnout. But gradually the group expanded, becoming more lively and vibrant in the process. A quiet hum of conversation gradually made way to music and game playing.

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<sup>5</sup> Although, of course, it is difficult to know how much police obstruction the activists would have been met with had the location been known, as the chosen site was public land and the historic site of a medieval peasant uprising, and the police were actively taking a ‘softer’ approach after the media reaction to their more ‘heavy handed’ response to the G20 protests in London earlier that year (including the infamous ‘kettling’ and the death of a bystander).



Figure 2: The Pink swoop group. In the left of the photo a game of Wizards, Pixies and Giants is taking place. (Photograph: authors own)

It seemed an age before we actually got up and started moving, certain people seemed to be waiting for information via their mobiles, telling them where to go to first. The location of the camp was kept quite secret, with only a select few knowing, the idea was to misdirect and confuse the police, not heading directly to the site but weaving around London with perhaps one group getting to the site first to claim and defend it. It wasn't clear if even the in-the-loop people of our group were actually in-the-loop. I felt slight bemused at this apparent hierarchy given the camp's anti-hierarchy stance, and at us being out-of-the-loop because we were first timers and not part of the inner group. Yet at the same time I felt irritated, as our meandered journey towards the site began, by the confusion and lack of leadership. Towards the end of our 'swooping' (though I had no idea we were towards the end), when we were in a train station buying train tickets, it wasn't made clear where we needed to buy tickets to and in turn which platform we needed to be on. We would ask various people we thought were in-the-know but most often were as confused as us.

After what felt like hours, and miles, of ‘swooping’ round London with our heavy rucksacks, we had a sense of being almost there. Walking up a hill from the strange small train station we had just arrived at we encountered many more rucksack clad people who were heading in the same direction. Before long we caught sight of tripods and a metal fence in the middle of a large grassy field, we had finally arrived.



Figure 3: The entrance to the Climate Camp, not long after the outside fence and tripods had been set up. (Photograph: Mike Russell)<sup>6</sup>

I was relieved to have finally arrived, but slightly disappointed in what I had arrived at; this was not the climate camp I had imagined, it was a bit of a grassy field with a metal fence around it. The weather seemed to be reflecting my mood; it was overcast and drizzling, yet the day had started so sunny and colourful. It was as if all the colour and joy had been sucked out of the day, the initial anticipation and enthusiasm had been replaced by tiredness and irritation. The feeling seemed to be mirrored by my companion, evident by the ease with which our conversations became arguments. We slumped down by the fence, deflated and defeated, most were doing the same; sitting with their bags in

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<sup>6</sup> All Climate Camp photos, apart from my own, are sourced from the Camp for Climate Action website (Camp for Climate Action, 2009), and permission from the photographers to use the them here and reference them as the photographer has been granted.

random places within the fenced enclosure. As the numbers within the fence began to build up people began gathering near the entrance to the camp, sitting in concentric circles. Soon after we decided to join the outside circle a speech began:



Figure 4: The welcome speech is about to take place.

(Photograph: Amelia Gregory)

“This is a perfect location for Climate Camp 2009; we can see the city, the skyscrapers gleaming in the distance. This is common land, it belongs to all of us, but also this place has over 600 years tradition of radical dissent and protest.”

[cheering, whooping and clapping]

“So why are we here? Well we’re here because this year we’ve seen how disastrous our political and economic system really is. We know that to fight climate change effectively ordinary people have to get together and do it themselves, and that is what the camp is all about.”

[whooping and clapping]

“So we are all part of the fastest growing, the most exciting, the most exceptional, the most dam beautiful movement probably on the planet today.”

[clapping and laughing]

“This year there are climate camps in Wales [cheering], in Scotland [cheering], in Ireland [cheering], in France, in Germany, in Belgium, in Denmark, in Finland, in the Ukraine, in South Korea, in India, in New Zealand, and in Ecuador. How incredible is that!”

[cheering, whooping, and clapping]

“This movement is really changing the world.”<sup>7</sup>

This rallying speech felt like quite an energetic burst, in contrast to the tired confusion which had proceeded. However things seemed to slow down again after people had dispersed. Soon not much seemed to be happening. There were a few vans, and piles of odds and ends seem to be accumulating, a few people were marking out something, pathways or neighbourhoods with tape and poles. We began to ask people if they knew where our, or any neighbourhood, was, the lack of hierarchy and organic nature of the camp’s set up seemed to mean that no one knew the full picture of what was going on, they only knew what they needed to do now. We asked the activist who had made the speech, assuming that they might be more informed than others, they however seemed to find it amusing that we thought this and were as unaware of the layout as us. A blackboard seem to suddenly appear near the entrance, here the planned layout of the site was drawn roughly in white chalk. At last we thought, we can set up our tent in our neighbourhood and the camp can start looking like a camp. But matching up the chalk drawing to lines and poles was much easier said than

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<sup>7</sup> Although I was present for this speech I didn’t have the foresight to record or write it down this is therefore taken from the filmed version which was put onto the ‘Climate Camp TV’ section of the Camp for Climate Action website (Undercurrentspaulo, 2009).

done. Especially as the plan was very simplified and idealised; very straight and orderly and symmetrical which the site itself was far from, having been marked out by confused vaguely directed people. When we did manage to decipher the location of our neighbourhood we discovered others already there who disagreed, this was now another neighbourhood they claimed. Our faith in the blackboard plan, which seemed to have changed each time we referred back to it, soon dissolved, as did our belief in the camp being anywhere near camp like before tomorrow. We then bumped into an equally confused North-East camper, and it became apparent that the three of us together made up the entirety of the North-East. The North-East neighbourhood we in turn discovered was to be literally wiped off the map and we were to be absorbed by the North-West neighbourhood. The disappointment at this news was quickly replaced by joy at finally being able to pitch our tent. We were now officially climate *campers*.

Soon our heads were filled with the thought of food, we hadn't eaten since breakfast (a barely edible English breakfast in a café near where we had arrived) and we did not share others optimism that the neighbourhood kitchens would be set up before tomorrow, so we headed down the hill in search of a café. On our return it was as if the camp had sprung out of nowhere. What had previously been a sparsely populated shell of a camp was now a dense temporary village made out of small domed tents and huge marquees. Glowing in the darkness it looked like a mysterious magical fair, which appeared at night and disappeared as the sun rose. I felt annoyed at my own impatience, it had made me miss out on seeing and being part of the camp's final development and finishing touches. My eagerness to deal with my own needs; setting up the tent and getting food, had positioned me on the sidelines of the camp's set up.



Figure 5: The camp's first night. (Photograph: Kristian Buus)

### **Negotiating the Camp Layout**

The above narrative offers glimpses of the first day's energetic peaks, troughs, 'accelerations' and 'decelerations' (Summers-Effler, 2010). Like Jullien's military strategy example of the chapter introduction, here we see the different elements combining to form different energetic dispositions at different points, for example the overcast weather combining with my physical tiredness and disappointment to encourage inaction (where inaction is considered not setting up the camp). Moments of deceleration seemed to coincide with expectations being disappointed, and the frustration of being part of what I perceived as an 'incomplete' space, and feeling sidelined from its development. Therefore the arrangement of the space (the exposed grass with sparse bodies and elements), combined with how I expected and imagined the space to appear, formed part of this disposition towards inaction. What is perhaps most interesting here is the authority I attached to the site plan, I expected the plan to be in control of the space and for it to be a final finished form, rather than tangled up in the process of setting up the camp. It is therefore these moments in relation to the site plan, and its role in arranging the space, which will form the focus of this discussion.

Initially the site plan was a thing at which enthusiasm and hope was directed and could enable action, such as attempting to locate the appropriate neighbourhood in the narrative. When this act failed, the plan, and its lack of authority and control over the space, became a target of blame. The plan, in my own case, was tied up in the desire to pitch our tent, which in doing so would make our presence a physical spatial element of the camp, and would transition our status from outsiders to insiders at the camp. What we were unaware of was that, like the rest of activities and processes at the camp, the deciding of the camp layout was a participatory process open to negotiation. Additionally, the dividing of the space was dependent on who had come to the camp, namely how many (or if any) had come from particular areas. For example, we turned out to be part of only a handful of North East campers and as this was too small a number to form a neighbourhood the North East was quite literally whipped off the map. This, as the photograph below shows (Figure 6) was one of many whippings, changes, and merges which the layout went through. The below image shows the plan in one of its initial forms:



Figure 6: The plan as it began, shortly after the site was ‘swooped’ on.

(Photograph: Amelia Gregory)

The final layout of the site was then a result of a negotiation and co-creation between a variety of activist from different neighbourhoods/groups and the plan itself. Therefore, the plan itself, was an *actor* (or ‘participant’ (Latour, 2005)) and *action* in itself, rather than merely an unchanging representation to be copied or a map to be followed. The site plan, as an actor and action, sits well within non-representational understandings of representation: “representation not as a code to be broken or as an illusion to be dispelled rather representations are apprehended as performative in themselves; as *doings*.” (Dewsbury *et al*, 2002: 438, my emphasis). Here the chalk plan is both a participant in the act of setting up camp and a ‘doing’ or an action, continuously changing and interacting with the surrounding subjects and ‘space’ even once it was ‘complete’.

The fact that a chalk board was chosen to display the site plan suggests that it was expected that the plan would change over the course of the set up, or indeed over the course of the camp itself. Indeed such easy and frequent rearranging of the climate camp space would not have been possible without the plan being in chalk/chalkboard form. The activist sitting in front of the chalk board above was holding several papers in their hand which seemed to be aiding them in the drawing of the plan. This suggests that the plan for the site layout was given some thought and planning by activists before the camp, namely the site management group, called simply the ‘site group’. Although it cannot be seen above<sup>8</sup>, in the original photograph the activist pausing from their act of drawing the plan appears exacerbated, one could imagine that this might be connected to the removing and rearranging that has been occurring, evident from smudges and crossings outs. The below images (Figure 7 and 8) show the progression of the plan:

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<sup>8</sup> as the activist was removed in order that they may remain anonymous



Figure 7: The plan after the camp has become established  
(Photograph: authors own)



Figure 8: The plan in its final form  
(Photograph: authors own)

The three plans show little variation in what is displayed but rather in how it is displayed: the plan was turned upside down in the later two (Figure 7

and 8) so that the entrance was now at the bottom of the plan and could face incoming visitors/activists. The plan also became more coded and colourful. It should be noted the photographs are not fully reflective of the changes which the plan underwent, as they show it in its later forms, but offer glimpses at the plan's evolution. Although alterations did occur on these later versions they were within a limited frame of change: particular areas were designated as neighbourhood space (outer area) and communal camp space (inner area). So while neighbourhoods could swap spaces with each other they could not move beyond the overall neighbourhood area. Equally main pathways were marked out very early on and could not be altered, these separated the main inner space from the outer space of the neighbourhoods. So while there was the overall impression of the set up as being a fully participatory process there were subtle limitations.

This negotiation between multiple actors and acts to form the arrangement of space is mirrored in the transition group's process of 'taking' and 'making' an office space. During my time with the transition group they decided to rent an office at the community association where the group held their regular 'hub' meetings. It was decided to establish an office space for several reasons: to provide a space in which to hold meetings without needing to have a whip round for room hire costs, to organise projects and grow social enterprises from, and to establish more of a physical local presence and therefore increase local knowledge and involvement in the group. Additionally, the establishing of an office space demonstrated the seriousness of the group to other local organisations and bodies (e.g. the council), and sits within an increasing professionalism of activism which Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) have observed: "the rejection of a more militant identity has in part given way not just to more pragmatism, but also more professionalism. This is in part an attempt to negotiate with official bodies, to reach out to other groups, and on an emotional level enable longer-term activism" (480). Each meeting and event which occurred in the office would leave its trace: a particular arrangement of furniture, new items, brainstormed ideas stuck up on the wall, posters and postcards on the door, pens and mugs left on the table. These arrangements, left as traces of the rooms previous use, became an actor in each new arrangement of the space, as would different occasions of tidying and messing up of the office. The space gradually evolved from a collection of boxes to a busy cluttered semi-organised

space. The arrangement of the space was never fully planned, discussed, or thought through, but instead involved a continuous and ongoing negotiation between the things in the office and those using it, and the events and activities happening in and around it. Similarly at the Climate Camp, each alteration of the plan by an activist, or reading/re-reading followed by an act on this basis, then became a new addition to the arrangement and negotiation of the space.

Both the arranging of the transition office space, and the space at the camp, demonstrate circular relations between ‘space’ and action, rather than the more linear relations suggested by Jon Anderson’s quotes in the chapter introduction. Anderson’s linear relations between activists and space echoes the “efficient causality” to which Bennett below refers. In a more circular idea of such relations “cause” and “effect” continually switch places and “rebound” off “each another”:

Here causality is more emergent than efficient, more fractal than linear. Instead of an effect obedient to a determinant, one finds circuits in which effect and cause alternate position and rebound on each other. If efficient causality seeks to rank the actants involved, treating some as external causes and others as dependent effects, emergent causality places the focus on the *process as itself an actant*, as itself in possession of degrees of agentic capacity.

(Bennett, 2010: 33, own emphasis)

As Bennett’s quote above point to, an actant in activism need not be only tangible material aspects of the ‘space’, processes can themselves become actants in the practice of activism. These processes of rearrangement and renegotiating of ‘space’ were then actors and participants themselves. And such relations clearly had energetic consequences, opening and closing the potential for action at various points and in different ways. For those who were open or aligned to the plan’s open-ended process the plan could enable action, for those who were not (such as my companion and I) the plan could limit action, that is action of a specific kind and purpose which here was the setting up of our tent in our neighbourhood.

Even after the ‘final’ arrangement of the space had been settled on and the plan brought into line with this, the plan still played a role in the energy dynamics of the camp, and the plan was still involved in the arrangement and re-arrangement of ‘space’ at the camp. The photograph below (Figure 9) shows how the site plan formed part of the clutter of the welcome tent.



Figure 9: The clutter around the Welcome Tent: the first stop for new arrivals and visitors (Photograph: authors own)

This colourful clutter added to the camp’s sense of vibrancy and also made the space feel more lived in and established. In turn, the welcome tent’s clutter formed part of the wider clutter of the camp which included: banners, notice boards/blackboards, artwork, sculptures, flags, multicoloured t-shirts, solar panels, wind-turbines, toilet graffiti (advertising actions and workshops), leaflets, campfires, free-shop/swap shop objects, food, straw bales, tripods, barriers, tents, marquees, fences, recycling bins, compost toilets, to name just a few.

More evident in the above photo (Figure 9), and only peeping into the picture in the previous photos (Figures 7 and 8), is the ‘Job Shop’ chalk board which resided under the site plan. This board listed jobs that needed doing and where volunteers were needed and was constantly updated over the course of a day. The ‘Job Shop’ formed part of the ongoing arranging and maintaining of the

camp: the arranging and negotiating of the workload at the camp. At the camp roles were managed through rota systems (a rotating of roles and volunteers) in order to explicitly avoid over-depletion of energy and imbalances in energy expenditure. This included formalised timetables and rotas within neighbourhoods (for cooking and cleaning duties within the neighbourhood itself) composed on a daily basis at the neighbourhood meetings by asking for a raise of hands for each job. This rota system reflected the politics of the camp, by (ideally) everyone contributing and playing their role or doing their bit, creating a sense of energy equality: “The camp is a non-hierarchical space: everyone is responsible for taking on tasks and making sure the site runs as effectively as possible” (Camp Handbook: p4), “Unlike a festival, the camp is not an event to be passively enjoyed” (p6). It also enabled activists to feel a part of the camp by literally creating and maintaining it themselves through their own actions. Although this was ultimately an ideal, as it was evident that some contributed more than others, and to more roles and responsibilities than others.

In addition to contributing to energy equality the objects at the camp (the chalk/white boards, the handbook timetables) participated in particular energy distributions. So while one activist was preparing food another could be attending a workshop, each facilitating one another’s actions, as one interviewee demonstrated in their reflections on the camp:

there’s always a lot of talk about living in different ways and things like that um but then actually to be at the camp where we were using quite a lot of these different ways of living, so we’ve got composting toilets, we’ve got wind power and solar power on the, on the camp, we’ve got um mass catering that meant that people could go and do their, their own thing. So we’ve got different groups facilitating different groups doing other stuff and things like that, and actually to be part of that was hugely positive

(post-camp interview extract, Appendix G)

This kind of dynamic is not unique to the camp, but obviously happens all the time in everyday life, but the difference here is that the relationship here is more intentional or by design and more overt. Furthermore this relationship is

constantly shifting and rotating rather than it being a particular activist's job to do the cooking or the washing up. This continuous rotating dynamic was part of the nature of the camp, although this continuous rotation applied only to more lower skilled and less specialised roles at the camp. The wellbeing space, for example, which will be the focus of the next section had a more specialised and limited workforce.

The point then is that this busyness and continuous rotation and circulation of the camp then becomes a new circular relation and process of interaction between the clutter of the camp, such as the site plan, and the activists at the camp, and in turn formed part of new conditions and potentials for action. Each object or clutter signalled actions that needed to and could be done (or not done), as did lists of jobs, the plan indicated places to go to (or not go to), timetable spaces whether blank or filled with a name signalled a task to be done (or not to be). Action to be done and needing done was a constant presence. In other words, each seemingly inanimate object or thing was swarming with potentiality (and impotentiality). The plan then, along with the rest of the clutter at the camp, formed part of numerous conditions for and potential for action, as did the processes or arrangements which they formed part of. The next section will again focus in on particular moments of the camp, here the focus will now turn to a very particular micro 'space' of the camp, the wellbeing space, although of course this labelling of micro is not meant to imply it as a less important space but rather as a specific sub-space of the camp.

### **The Wellbeing Space**

The Wellbeing space is somewhere to come and relax, de-stress, rest or have a cup of tea. Our 'opening times' are 10am to 10pm, but there will be someone in the space for emergency support 24 hours a day. We are offering 'emotional first aid', not counselling, but if that is what anyone needs we will try to put them in contact with people who can help. Our phone number during and after the camp is [mobile phone number]. Come in, chill out and chat to each other, but please remember that this is not a social space, but a place for recovery, re-energising and support. The Wellbeing Tent is also the base for the Activist Trauma

Support Team at the camp. If you want to talk to someone in private about any traumatic or stressful situations, we have people available. We also offer group debriefing on stressful incidents, avoiding burnout and sustainable activism, and information and practical help on living and acting sustainably. Also check out the workshop Burnout and Sustainable Activism, Sun 2.30pm SM2. (Camp Handbook, p9)

The Wellbeing space positions itself as a place of healing; either emotionally in the form of ‘active listening’ or physically such as alternative treatments and massages, and as a place of recharging (“re-energising”); either through the services it offers or simply through its function as a space in which to take time-out. This space is in itself an acknowledgement of the imperfect nature of the camp, activists, and activism more broadly. It seems to hint at the human nature of the activist, contrasting to the traditional ‘hero’ image (Summers-Effler, 2010) implying superhuman, which is often assigned or self-assigned to activists. In turn it suggests an evolution in activist tactics, the burnout of previous generations signalling the need for self nurturing and emotional sustainability.

The ethos of the Wellbeing space and Activist Trauma Support (ATS) team has evidently spread through the camp, in the ‘Creating our Community’ section of the handbook there was a section for new and old campers, in the latter it stated “Not so new to all this? Remember that you do have a personal capacity: share the load, ask for help if you need it. Have a friend who tells you if you’re taking on too much and not letting go” (Camp Handbook, p8). Equally this is suggested in the ATS literature:

At Climate Camp 2007 it was apparent that the presence of the Wellbeing space helped to ease tensions on the site; even among those who had no need to actually make use of it, there seemed to be a general feeling that it was good that we were looking after our own. On top of this it seemed to become more acceptable for people to ask each other how they were feeling or how they were coping.

(Extract from an ATS Leaflet)

The above extract suggests that the space has an effect beyond the confines of the wellbeing walls, its presence in itself encouraging emotional and energetic awareness and providing the potential for support. Therefore it could be said to serve a double function, as well as directly counselling or rather ‘active listening’ and comforting activists, it creates an atmosphere of emotional awareness and acceptance. By having a wellbeing space at the camp specifically for burnout, and other emotional issues, burnout is not seen as an individual failure or problem but rather a collective problem which the collective has a responsibility to counter. This is a central philosophy of the ATS group, and it is mirrored in other groups including the Transition group. For example, avoiding burnout was highlighted by one transition group member as an important topic for discussion by the group, and when attendance to meetings dropped or participants were feeling drained by meetings this was seen as a failing of the group and an issue for the group to counter, rather than a failing or fault of the individual. The following narrative recounts my first encounters with the wellbeing space and ATS team.

### **Encounters with Wellbeing**



Figure 10: The wellbeing tent’s sign (photograph: authors own)

“I’m not comfortable with you being here”, the words kept repeating in my mind. I felt hurt and confused. I had just been thrown out of the wellbeing new recruits meeting. I had gone to the meeting hoping that I would be able to help out; run errands or make tea for people, and get to meet the wellbeing volunteers. But it seemed that the only kind of wellbeing volunteer was the counselling kind, and for this you needed experience or qualifications. The meeting had begun with a go round of everyone’s training/experience, which had the feel of a group interview, and made me feel instantly excluded and unsettled. I explained rather nervously who I was and why I was there, and that while it wasn’t appropriate for me to counsel activists (not to mention my lack of experience and training) I’d love to be able to help in some way, and if possible interview willing volunteers when there was a free moment. It wasn’t until sometime later that the person sitting next to me announced to the group, rather than to me, that they weren’t “comfortable”. There was no further explanation, the stares and silence I soon realised were signalling for me to leave. “I’d be happy to be interviewed, it sounds really interesting” one person said as I was about to zip up the door, obviously noticing my distress. I retreated to my tent, zipped myself in and confided in my companion.

My upset quickly became my companion’s anger, as I tearfully explained what had happened. After I had unburdened myself onto my companion, I began to see my own mistakes and feel more embarrassed than hurt. I realised that I should have spoken to someone before the meeting and found out exactly what the volunteering involved and if I could come along. But perhaps there was nothing I could have said or done that would have made everyone there trust and feel comfortable around me immediately. There was an atmosphere of distrust present subtly at the camp. It occasionally surfaced, such as interview moments where I found myself being more the interviewee than the interviewer, and posters warning that ‘tents have ears’:

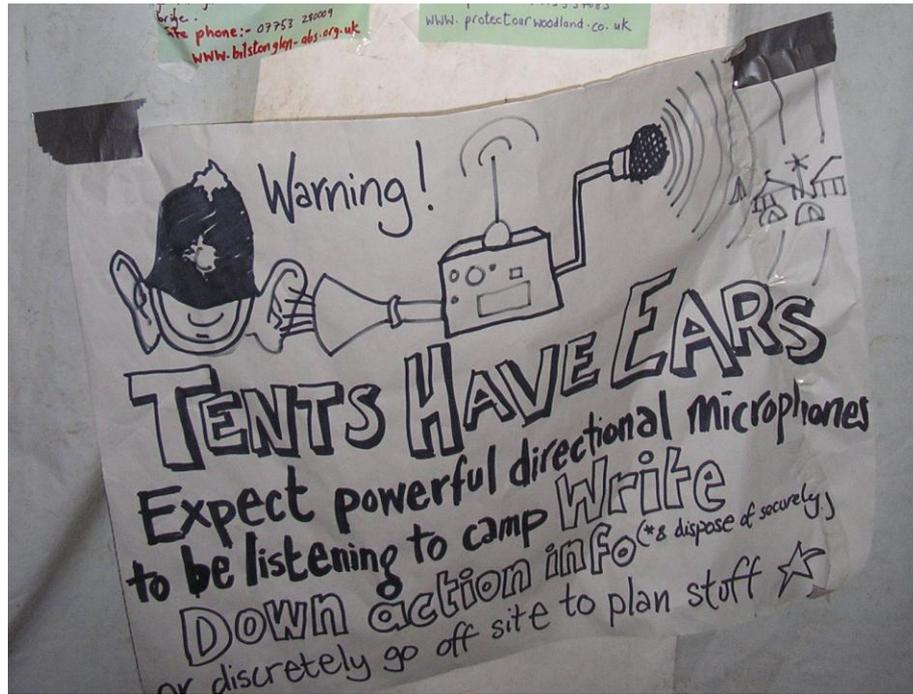


Figure 11: poster in the welcome tent (photograph: authors own)

I reflected on what about the incident had surprised and upset me. They of course had every right to ask me to leave, especially as I had misunderstood the exact nature of the meeting and the volunteering itself. It was more the way it had been said and the reaction of the group which had caught me off guard. It seemed to have been delivered without tact or consideration i.e. that even though I was a researcher I still had feelings. The person smiled unpleasantly and even seemed pleased that they had the power to tell me to leave. The delay between me telling the group I was a researcher and them deciding they were uncomfortable seemed strange and unnecessary, lulling me into a false sense of security, thinking ‘oh it’s OK then for me to be here’. If I had been asked to leave just after explaining who I was it would have felt entirely different.

The others’ reaction equally troubled me, instead of saying “I’m afraid that this means...” or “do you mind if...”, they simply stared coldly. The circle form in which we sat and the cramped space of the tent seemed to exaggerate this; my humiliation and discomfort was exposed and on show to everyone. I had assumed, before even encountering them, that the wellbeing people would be warm, open, and caring, and more trusting and inclusive than the rest of the camp. But while they may be this way to activists who come to them, why

should they be so to ‘outsiders’? After all they were protecting and guarding the most vulnerable space of the camp and the activists themselves.

It took some effort to attend the ‘burnout and sustainable activism’ workshop being run by the wellbeing team. The confidentiality of discussions within the workshop was emphasised quite heavily at the beginning by the wellbeing volunteers. We sat in a large circle which took up most of the tent. I was surprised at the nature of the workshop compared to the others I had attended which were essentially talks. This was much more participatory, and participant lead. I assumed the wellbeing team, being experienced in matters of burnout and sustainable activism, would offer their learned advice on mechanisms for dealing with burnout and maintaining a more emotionally sustainable form of activism. But they merely directed the workshop, telling people to discuss experiences in pairs and then feed back to the group, the idea I assume being that people would learn from each other, but it meant that the workshop could have been facilitated by anyone. But this seemed to be intended to be empowering and non-hierarchical i.e. we are not the experts, we all already possess the knowledge collectively.

The workshop began with a general discussion on the nature of burnout, with the wellbeing team asking participants to define and describe what burnout meant to them. After this general discussion we were told to get into pairs by walking around the tent randomly in an angry way, though I couldn’t quite bring myself to do this and just walked around normally, and then when they said to stop we sat and talked to the person nearest to us, we were told to do so in an ‘active listening’ way (listening to the other person without interrupting but offering encouragement in the form of nods and agreement and using open body language i.e. no crossed arms and maintaining eye contact - we were told about this and what it was before we started this exercise). I was surprised and touched by how open my partner was to me about personal details of their past and hard times in their life and how these connected to the beginning of their activist involvement. They turned out to be a wellbeing volunteer and when they agreed to be interviewed I felt quite boosted and privileged after my blunders of before.

When I first entered the wellbeing space the contrast surprised me, namely the darkness and the quietness of the space compare to other spaces at the camp. Here conversations occurred at a whisper, and the darkness resulted from

the thick material of the marquee and the fact that the entrance was quite narrow compared to other marquees. It was a green stripy marquee which made me think of circuses, and the sign indicating it to be the wellbeing space had something equally child-like about it. As I entered the tent I was greeted with suspicious rather than welcoming looks. More than any other space at the camp this was a space to be guarded and protected. This was the only space which was partitioned into smaller rooms, the smaller domed tent next door where the meeting had been held was also part of the space, used when more privacy was required. This was also the most padded space, with cushions, mattresses and blankets visible in the gaps between the sheets partitioning different rooms of the tent. At the back someone was lying on a table for a massage, by the entrance there was a table lined with tea, biscuits and leaflets, next to it an old-fashioned looking sofa with two activists perched on it talking. I noticed the activist from the workshop straight way, they were sat crossed legged with another activist not more than a yard away from the entrance. To the first eyes which had greeted me (with suspicion) I explained that I had arranged an interview with the other volunteer.



Figure 12: The signs on the wellbeing tent (photograph: authors own)

## **Wellbeing: containment and living attention**

The surprise which accompanied my initial experience of the wellbeing group demonstrates the assumptions I had already made about the feelings associated with the space and its people. Namely, it being a space of purely positive experiences, a place to heal, recuperate, and “re-charge”, cut off literally from any negative intrusion of feelings and experiences. The ideal, or aim of the space, does not mean that only such feelings and activities occur in it, those of healing and recharging, the narrative demonstrates that contradictory and unexpected moments can of course occur. The wellbeing space can then be a site of (minor in this case) trauma. Just as others may find their own personal spaces (such as their tents) more healing and recharging, where confinement can take place in a more familiar space and between those they already know. Wellbeing can then be seen as a space of overflow, when friendships are not the spaces where such processes can take place it becomes the task of wellbeing, also when the emotions are excess so as to need special treatment. The implicit undercurrent was that it is selfish to unburden onto those around you as this in turn affects them, and this assumes a contagious nature to energetic states or feelings where such feelings are simply caught or transmitted. Wellbeing is then the official approved space for such activity, namely for ‘treating’ such states, and where, it is assumed, such negative affects can be effectively contained for the benefit of the wider camp.

The experience of being excluded from the first meeting, described in the above narrative, also demonstrates that spaces of resistance can equally be spaces of power, including: hierarchies of activism, the power to lead and control even within apparent non-hierarchies, the power to exclude outsiders. This is mirrored in Jon Anderson’s experiences of an environmental protest camp when several homeless people were removed from the camp because of their disruptive behaviour:

whilst these individuals were comatose, a decision was arrived at to eject them from the site, and their bags and belongings were taken to their known haunt in town. The next day the individuals followed them voluntarily and did not return...This incident also illustrates that EDA’s spatial practice is not simply one of resistance, but also in its way one of

domination – coercing individuals into certain ways of behaviour (i.e. “You will behave ecocentrically!”), then imposing punishments if they fail to do so. (J. Anderson, 2004: 121-2)

Both Anderson and the wellbeing example demonstrate the intertwined nature of power and resistance. This exercising of power can influence energy in terms of closing off or opening up to conditions for action, both for those who feel in possession of power and those who it is perceived to be wielded against. The insider/outsider relations can have implications for energy not only in the act of othering or excluding and being othered/excluded, but equally the way in which the act of exclusion is also a removal or separation from a particular space. This act of being closed off from a space can in turn become a state of being closed off from conditions for particular forms of actions, and beyond the space concerned. The insider/outsider divide can equally be demonstrated by the narrative photos, which show only the outside of the main wellbeing tent, this is partly because it felt inappropriate to take pictures inside, but also partly a feeling that it would not be allowed for this reason. In this way the space was a site of containment from outside prying eyes. The act of prying is perhaps assumed to disrupt the re-energising potential of the space. These implicit appropriate and inappropriate forms of behaviour by the very arrangement of the wellbeing space: being in a thickly shielded permanently dark tent with few and narrow openings.

The insider/outsider element, and its potential energetic implications, therefore involves the elements of the wellbeing space as much as the wellbeing volunteers themselves, and involved a quite literal process of spatial exclusion. Additionally clearly the feeling of being excluded was exaggerated by the close confined space of the wellbeing tent, and the circular spatial arrangement of the volunteers: all eyes were quite literally on me. The size of this space and the number of activist in attendance meant that this arrangement of bodies was particularly close and squashed. A different arrangement, such as a larger, lighter, and more open tent in which bodies could be spread out and some out of view, would have formed a very different disposition.

But this close confined attention is quite contrasting to the typical contained attention practices of the wellbeing space, namely the act of ‘active

listening'. This technique, used by the wellbeing volunteers, has in-itself an activist ring to it, and suggests an activist form of counselling. It also sits well in the DiY ethos in modern environmental and anarchist activism: activists helping themselves rather than seeking a professional from the 'outside' for help. The wellbeing volunteer I interview argued that it is also a form of resistance, along with consensus decision making, to the perceived lack of listening in the outer world (beyond the camp e.g. politicians ignoring activists). This is highlighted in the extract below in which they describe not being heard as "a form of oppression":

I believe that like listening to people does like, does really work because when you don't feel heard that's a form of oppression, and being heard helps you feel like a person, and I think that's very much in line with the camp ethos where we're making decisions by consensus decision making, which means everybody gets heard so those things are kind of, yeah, in line here I think, yeah. (Wellbeing interview extract, Appendix C)

This active listening has the potential to energise, that is, re-open activist to the conditions for action, through the direction of focused attention from one person to another. This attention is what Brennan (2004) calls "living attention":

Just as the negative affects may deplete energy, so can the positive affects enhance it. If I receive another's love, I receive their living attention; and this attention, logically, is a biological force in itself, as palpable an energy as adenosine triphosphate (ATP), the bioenergetic basis of life and consciousness. (Brennan, 2004: 34)

While Brennan takes living attention as synonymous with love, we could conceive of it more broadly, as a kind of undivided and focused attention of one thing to another. This is a practice which draws attention to the importance of human dynamics in energy relations, I do not therefore wish to propose that more-than-human elements do the *same* things as human and play the same role in energy dynamics, instead the argument is that things do things at well. But this practice is made possible through both the contained arrangement of the human

bodies and the contained arrangement of other things in relation to this practice, just as Ahmed's (2010) act of walking across the road is made possible through the existence of the road. The surrounding things therefore form part of the conditions for this act, and in turn enable it to open up subjects to further conditions and acts. This containment operates by removing distractions, especially as the camp was a site of constant commotion, and thus increasing the attention of the active listener and increasing the intensity of the direction of living attention.

In the narrative above I experienced a form of the wellbeing's living attention through the interview I conducted in the same space as the volunteer meeting. In this experience the focused attention of the wellbeing volunteer in the interview did feel to an extent enhancing, in the sense of a feeling of barriers and blocks built up by the previous experience being lowered and relaxed. But arguably this was experienced partly because of the contrast, and in this sense the previous experience lingered on as a condition in the act of the interview. This contrast was also equally a contrast of spatial arrangements within the wellbeing tent: the cramped uncomfortable containment reinforcing feelings of exposure and hurt, compared to the relaxed, roomy and intimate containment of the interview. The relaxed atmosphere of the second experience was additionally fed into by the interviewee's calm and relaxed tone and rhythm of voice, combined with their choice of words (frequent 'yeah's and 'cool's), as well as the heavily cushioned nature of the tent compartment we sat in.

The process of directing living attention can influence the energetic conditions for the active listener themselves, as the wellbeing volunteer described in the interview:

well right now after having done a fairly long one on one I do feel drained, um but I don't feel negative I feel like, um I really want to be useful at the camp, um supporting activists in a caring role that's why I'm in wellbeing and also in the medic tent, um so I feel good that I've got a chance to practice my skills that's gonna be helpful for my studies and I just feel good that I've been useful to someone so yeah. Yeah, yeah, I mean I think if there had been actual traumas with the police and stuff to deal with probably I would experience a bit of second hand

traumatisation as well, when you hear about things that have happened to people, but that hasn't happened this camp  
(Wellbeing interview extract, Appendix C)

The volunteer feeling pleasantly 'drained' by their active listening reinforces the simplifying association of negative affects with feelings of depletion, and positive affects with feelings of enhancement. But it offers a difficult theorising in terms of energy as the conditions for action as it suggests that energy is literally drained, however we could assume that the practice of active listening and the effort it requires is physically draining and the subject therefore chooses to close off from the broader conditions for action in order to nurture their own. Of course physical, just as emotional tiredness, is a part of the conditions for action, so therefore where this occurs a subject can become misaligned to and closed off from the wider conditions for action.

Alongside the living attention practices of the wellbeing space, the space also provided time-out from the camp through its spatial arrangement of containment and separation from the rest of the camp. Away from the hustle and bustle, and 'intensity' of the camp:

this year and last year are quite different, because last year the policing at Kingsnorth was really really heavy there was a lot more kind of actual trauma, people were feeling traumatised because of the police. Um, this year nothing like that's come up and we've very much just been in the role of like people who've been like out in the elements in the field just wanting like extra blankets and stuff, and people wanting actually a space where they can go where camp business isn't discussed, because here it's like there's no break, like you think you're sitting down to chill and then someone comes and they want to know your opinion about this, or if you can come to a meeting, or if you can get a list together for something, and there's, it's literally like non-stop, and I think it's really important to have a space where people can just come and just, just chill, because it's actually not possible out there in the camp. And so most people are happy to sort themselves out, they just want to come in and be by themselves.  
(Wellbeing interview extract, Appendix C)

This might be because activists are feeling overwhelmed in which case it provides a space to be underwhelmed: a quite, dark, comforting (through sofas, beddings, and tea and biscuits) space. The wellbeing team themselves acknowledge the role that such more-than-human elements and arrangements can play in energy dynamics: “There is a definite need for general welfare work – cups of tea, massages, a quiet space and blankets can make an enormous difference, and can help prevent burn-out” (Activist Trauma Support, 2005: 260).

Pauses or taking time out from the ‘intense’ nature of the camp also occurred in more improvised ways: activist’s napping in their own tents, or taking a break from the camp completely by walking down into the local high street. Many at the camp seemed to take time-out or ‘re-charge’ through other practices, in particular practices of play: painting, playing football, frisbee, and the mass action game. The morning yoga sessions for example functioned as preventative measure and less overt treatment of perceived energy depletion through relaxing activists, as opposed to the wellbeing team’s treatment of already reached energy depletion/blocking. Both wellbeing and broader practices of ‘recharging’ were not a literal recharging of energy but rather I would argue the restoring of an openness to energetic conditions and a removing or softening of energetic defences and blocks.

The next section will discuss the daily neighbourhood meetings, in which similar contained spatial arrangements and improvised methods of dealing with the apparent ‘drain’ of the meetings emerged.

### **The Neighbourhood Meetings**

The neighbourhood meetings were an important part of the Climate Camp’s organisational structure, taking place every morning between 9 and 10.30 am within the communal tent of each neighbourhood. Here activist sat in a circle or concentric circles to discuss camp issues and decisions, they served as a practical way for everyone to take part in decision making and therefore for the camp’s egalitarian politics to be performed. During meetings two self-appointed ‘spokes’ (spokespersons) would be sent from each neighbourhood meeting to the site wide meeting which directly followed and relay and represent their neighbourhoods

views and decisions. Although the role of spoke would rotate each day, the role meant that some activists would spend their whole morning in meetings.

The circular form of the meeting was a dominate arrangement at the camp, and like the neighbourhood meeting the majority of the circular spatial forms consisted of the activists<sup>9</sup> themselves, as demonstrated by the image (Figures 13) below. The circular form was also the arrangement of meetings in the eco-village and transition group examples, and has therefore been chosen as the focus here for this reason.



Figure 13: Introduction to the camp (photo by Mike Russell)

It could be argued that circles were the primary spatial arrangement at the Camp: all meetings occurring in circles, including the introductory meeting (Figure 4), the welcome tent meetings (Figure 13) the morning neighbourhood meetings, and site wide meetings. The learning and teaching activities of the camp (workshops) also generally took place in circles, or concentric circles (in the case of larger groups) around the leader/facilitator of the workshop. Many of the social aspects of the camp involved circles, in particular the nightly campfire gatherings and morning yoga sessions, as well as barn dancing. Additionally,

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<sup>9</sup> Here I am referring to anyone at the camp as an activist, for reasons of simplification, even though the individuals may not class themselves as such, or may be journalists or visitors (or researchers)

overall the camp itself could be described as a rough circle, as demonstrated by the site plan's final incarnation (Figure 8). Circles also appeared in subtler ways, as aspects of different elements, such as: the curve of the tent roofs, the wind turbines, the straw bale amphitheatre style entrance (see Figure 14 below), the huge inflatable globe inside a greenhouse frame, the peace and anarchy symbols painted on the huge canvas cube, and the wheels of the many bicycles dotted around the camp including the bike powered smoothie maker. However, the narrative below will focus on the particular circular arrangement of the neighbourhood meetings and the practices within this arrangement.



Figure 14: the straw bale amphitheatre at the entrance (photograph by Kriptick)

### **Sitting in circles**

“W\*\*kers!”, “get a job!”, “highdy high campers!”, accompanied by car horns, was the sound our first morning at the camp began to, these were the shouts of van and bus drivers driving along the busy road on the other side of the camp fence. The intention was obviously to wake up people still asleep. Mostly it seemed to be coming from working class men towards middle age. I was quite surprised by this hostility as I hadn’t expected it and it made me feel quite uneasy. Shouts such as these were to become our daily alarm clock.

The first morning also meant that it was the first morning neighbourhood meeting. It seemed strange having to be up early at the camp, neighbourhood meetings began at 9am (till 10.30am), I had imagined things would be more relaxed and less rigid and timetabled. We quickly got dressed and ate our breakfast then made our way to the larger tent a few yards away, where presumably the meeting would be taking place. We were one of the first to arrive and so made ourselves (un)comfortable on a free straw bale, there was a feeling of us all waiting for some kind of neighbourhood leaders or more experienced activists to begin the meeting. Others had clearly also come with friends or knew each other and conversations didn't seem to expand beyond these relationships as we all waited for the leader/s to arrive. And indeed soon some arrived who seemed to take charge, either because they had been to the camp before or were heavily involved in local groups (such as the North West wing of the Camp for Climate Action).

Everyone seemed to automatically sit in a circle, partly because this was how the space was arranged (i.e. the straw bales) and being arranged, but there was no actual discussion or instruction of this. Although if people arrived late they were told to "come into the circle" or "sit in the circle". Soon flip charts and felt-tip pens were at the ready and the meeting was about to begin. First it was stated (by the leading/experienced activists) that someone needed to volunteer themselves as facilitator/leader of the meeting, and someone else as a note/minute taker (who would also be a 'spoke'), and two 'spokes' who would attend the site wide meeting following the neighbourhood meeting where they would relay decisions made and represent the group's opinions, and feedback about this meeting to the group in the following day's neighbourhood meeting. Someone had to remain a 'spoke' for two days in a row so that one of the spokes had some experience of the meetings. Also an 'emergency spokes' had to volunteer who would be given a camp mobile phone and would be on call all day in case an emergency site meeting was called.

It was also announced that all these roles (facilitator, minute taker, spokes, emergency spoke) had to be rotated, but over the week they seem to rotate between the same group of people, i.e. a spoke from the previous day would be a facilitator the next, and once they had taken on one of these roles they seemed to remain in a position of authority. This group were all young (early

twenties) men and women, though mostly men, all had the appearance of students, and though this was the North-West and North-East neighbourhood few of the group had northern accents. Although these roles were sold as a good way for new people to learn about the camp the implicit view was that really they were for more experienced activists, and they clearly required confidence. This system combined with the hand gestures made for quite a complicated and strict sense of order.

After these roles had been assigned, mostly to those who had explained them, things began properly with an explanation of the hand gestures to be used in the meeting; a style of anarchist consensus decision making. The repetition of the rules of the meetings (hand gestures) for the new arrivals was to become a daily chore at the beginning of each meeting. This repetition became quite an irritation to me as I had come across them years earlier in the first activist group I had been involved in and still found them ridiculous. Several hand gestures were used each with their own meaning: both hands were held up and waved if you agreed, both hands were held low and facing downwards if you disagreed, a finger was raised to make a point, two fingers (one on each hand) to make a direct point, a t-sign with both hands to make a technical point, a raised fist to represent a block if you wished to block a proposal, a raised hand represented a stand aside if you didn't mind a proposal going ahead but wished to stand aside from it. Though generally people simply raised their hands to speak as they wanted to explain why they were standing aside/blocking. And sometimes people would use the direct point hand gesture (two fingers raised) in order to speak next as this gesture jumped the queue; they would automatically be picked to speak next with this gesture. While the hand gestures created a very orderly system of response they weren't used in a uniformed way, individual's enthusiasm for the discussion and meeting more generally could be measured by people's hand gestures; lack of vigour in their gestures and the height at which they held their hand (the higher up the more enthusiastic it seemed). As the group's energy waned group members barely moved their hands or arms to make the gestures, and the number of people making any gesture at all fell as the meeting progressed.

The idea behind these gestures was that everyone was involved in the meeting, even if they do not want to speak, and decisions are made through

compromise and agreement rather than voting. There is also supposedly no hierarchy in consensus decision making, although there is a facilitator (the fact that they were called this rather than leader seemed to be very important) who allows people to speak, based on the order in which they have put their hand up, and introduces topics for suggestions. Though they have no power per se in terms of decisions reached they still have the appearance of being in charge, and power in the sense of choosing who speaks next. After a few days it was decided that two people would facilitate as it created less of an impression of the facilitator being in charge. The same group of people facilitated and were 'spokes' and certain people always dominated the discussions, these were those with more dominant and confident personalities, who were perhaps also more experienced in leading groups and being involved in the camp and other activist activities. The spokes also seemed to have the same dominance and command within the group as the facilitators. Although this dominance occurred partly due to lack of participation, the dominance further reinforced this creating a vicious circle. The dominance of certain people within the roles of spokes and facilitator, and discussion in general, made the consensus and participatory approach feel like an illusion. I often found myself feeling pressured into agreeing as so many others were or to simply speed up the meeting.

It soon became clear that rather than serving any real practical purpose (very minor and trivial issues were discussed) the meetings were simply a way to make people feel involved in the camp decision making. The trivial nature of the issues discussed (e.g. people 'weeing' in the 'poo-only' toilets, or not attending the meetings), combined with the slow pace of the meetings through the need for everyone (who wanted to) to have their say, created an almost immediate feeling of boredom and depletion. There were suggestions that we were not alone in these feelings by comments made at meal times, and the numbers at meetings decreasing despite the neighbourhood expanding. Those running and most involved in the neighbourhood meetings seem to maintain/sustain their energy throughout the hour and a half long session while others seem to grow tired and bored and drained of energy.

There were attempts to make the meetings more enjoyable; during one meeting, an activist from bicycology (a group of bike activists) was keen to play a game as a group but it was decided by the facilitators that there wasn't enough

time. Another method which was deployed to cope with the boredom and depletion of the meetings was eating; increasingly people began to bring their breakfast to the meeting. This increase in cereal bowls at the following days meetings signalled that the meetings were not taken seriously but rather were something to endure (and could be endured better with cereal) so therefore campers could get up later and use the meeting time to have their breakfast. It also signalled that the meetings were not something to participate in but rather to watch, as you could hardly wave your hands while you were holding a bowl of cereal and no one with cereal in their hands seemed to contribute.

Yet despite these affects we, and many others (although the numbers attending decreased despite neighbourhood numbers increasing), continued to attend the meetings. They felt almost compulsory; campers were certainly expected to go, at breakfast time several activists would go around the neighbourhood shouting that the meeting would be starting soon. There was to some extent an adaption to the meetings when it was known what to expect, that they would involve being bored, they became a place in which to wait for the day to begin and to urge the meetings to finish, a place to look forward to the main activities of the day such as the workshops of interest. The absence produced by the boredom then made room for other activities. On the last day we positioned ourselves by the door, on the outer circle, and sneaked out soon after the meeting began, this sneaking, avoiding its depleting nature, and rebelling against the implicit rules of the camp, produced a high which we carried home with us on our journey back.

### **Circles: exposure and enclosure**

A few months ago, while riffling through my column clippings searching for a lost statistic, I noticed a couple of recurring themes and images. The first was the fence. The image came up again and again: barriers separating people from previously public resources, locking them away from much needed land and water, restricting their ability to move across borders, to express political dissent, to demonstrate on public streets, even keeping politicians from enacting policies that make sense for the people who elected them. (Klein, 2002: xviii)

Just as Klein found fences and windows appearing frequently within her research, the spatial form of the circle was repeatedly encountered within this research, across all three forms of activism. For example, in the transition group meetings always took place in a rough (as opposed to perfect) circle, and other activist meetings I attended also involved circles. While at the eco-village circles appeared in several forms including sitting around a table to share our precious objects at the end of the volunteer experience week, sitting around the camp fire in the evening, or the circle dancing we were taught on our final night. Additionally, the low-impact structures themselves were mostly circles or rounded in design, including the ‘roundhouses’. But circles were especially prevalent as an organisational and spatial arrangement at the Climate Camp, often in explicit and intentional ways:

For a few days, we settle down to experimental, collective living based on different principles. We sit in *circles*, not behind boardroom desks, we co-operate rather than divide and build a network of friends with the confidence to grow a new world.

(Climate Camp Handbook, 2009: 21, own emphasis)

This frequency is, as the above suggests, partly due to its opposition to everyday organisation forms and shapes, as well as its political implications; suggesting equality and a removal of hierarchy: “The goals of circle rituals are the experience of mutual affection, equal rights, the softening of hierarchies” (Magyar-Haas and Kuhn, 2010: 7). The circle then, as well as resisting the apparently square and rectangular world of the everyday, seeks to resist the power hierarchies inherent within them and reinforced by them. Though that is not to say that circles in themselves are forms of resistance to hierarchies or social norms, but rather the particular ways they are used here. The circle was ingrained with certain ideals, that of empowerment and encouragement of involvement, in practice however these ideals are not always realised or only realised for some, this in turn has consequences for energy. In circles the space in the middle of the circle can become a space of creativity, of idea sharing, a space for pooling the groups combined potential. But it can also become a void which

only a few of the circle seek to fill, the ideal of equality which the circle (and the camp more broadly) seeks to foster is not always achieved. In the narrative's example of the neighbourhood meetings certain people who appeared to have more enthusiasm and confidence seemed to flourish in the circle form, while others appeared to wilt.

The final part of the above narrative, the sneaking out of the neighbourhood meeting and deriving pleasure from it, contrasts starkly to the wellbeing narrative beginning in which I was thrown out of the volunteer meeting. Both involved a similar act and yet completely different energy dynamics. Equally both are examples of unintended and unexpected occurrences within these spaces. Here in this example, the meeting was meant to be a space of empowerment, the circle arrangement encouraging involvement. But instead this close physical and visible proximity seemed to exaggerate the depleting potential of the meeting, and trap depleting bodies. Here this depletion is understood as a closing off to the conditions and in turn the potential for action, rather than a literal depletion, and a closing off in relation to the desired action here: actively participating in the meeting in some form. But the meeting did not appear to be depleting for all activists concerned, those with roles of responsibility and those who contributed most seemed able to sustain their interest and energy. This sense of them possessing more energy than others may simply be the confusion of confidence with energy, where their position and experience gave them confidence or they appeared confident because of these factors. But confidence can be arguable in particular contexts, including in this context, be suggestive of an alignment and openness to the conditions for action.

The narrative then suggests a double spatiality to the energies of the meeting: an inner circle and outer circle. Although this spatiality was not always necessarily in a literal sense: while often those on the spatial outskirts of the meeting did not contribute, at the same time there were times when some of those sitting in the main circle did not participate either. Therefore there seemed to be no particular position in the circle which encouraged a certain disposition, instead it was more about the relation to the process and processes of the meeting. The (non-literal) inner circle consisted then of those who participated and facilitated, who through this leading and contributing appeared able to sustain their energy throughout the meeting, through a kind of giving and

receiving of energies (in the form of living attention perhaps) to the space of the circle and a state of being open to these energies. The outer circle consisted of those not actively participating (or only in the form of hand gestures) who were at different moments listening, bored, or elsewhere in their thoughts. This dynamic could be partly attributed to the containment and exposure of the arrangement and the different relations to this exposure and containment:

Thus, circle situations have not only a formal but also an ideal group-constituting function. Viewed from the outside, this material formation presents itself as a *closed entity* that is seldom broken up, and only to let in legitimate members. Towards the inside, the circle is open...the participants in the circle rituals are with *their whole bodies always potentially exposed to the surveillance of others*. In this way the circle provides protection against the “outside”, but not against the “inside”, for the possibilities to evade the group members’ looks are limited, and there is a certain degree of protectionlessness.

(Magyar-Haas and Kuhn, 2010: 10, my emphasis)

On the one hand the circle aims at equality and empowerment: everyone’s voice and input is considered equal in a circle, and the circle seeks to encourage participation and contribution. And the exposed element to which Magyar-Haas and Kuhn above refer had a practical purpose, as in a circle arrangement the hand gesture employed, which were part of the consensus decision making process, required everyone’s hands to be visible to everyone else, and in particular to the facilitator. On the other hand, there is a feeling of exposure in the circle as Magyar and Kuhn highlight above, which brings to mind Foucault’s (1977) writing on surveillance and the prison. In a circle there is no place to hide, the lack of contribution or over-contribution of group members is clearly visible. This exposure can have energetic consequences in terms of locking up or closing off from the conditions for action, and this potential effect of the exposure of the circle is also evident in the wellbeing volunteer recruitment meeting referred to in the wellbeing narrative. In the circle therefore potential for shame and embarrassment is increased:

With the circle formation, the potentially shaming nature of the situation is particularly increased, due to fact that possibilities to evade are restricted. With this formation there is no outstanding observing position...instead, everyone participating in the circle is raised to a potential observer.

(Magyar-Haas and Kuhn, 2010: 11)

Participants in the circle can therefore continually shift or rotate between participants in and observers of the meeting, or both simultaneously. While in a circle there is no “outstanding observing position” that is not to say that a circle should be considered to have no head or point of focus. In the case of the neighbourhood meetings this focus was the facilitator and minute taker (with their flipchart), their energy was then perhaps not only sustained by their power and authority within the group but also this directed attention. This may have partly involved the “living attention” mentioned in the previous section, as the circle of the meeting allowed for an intense concentration of living attention on the facilitators of the meeting.

Another element in the facilitators perceived sustaining of energy may be their continued participation and interaction with the process of the meeting. Others, not participating, seemed to grow bored and become a different energetic rhythm and pace to the facilitators, such as the way Anderson (2004) describes boredom as seeming to suspend time. Boredom in this context could be argued to involve a shutting off from the conditions for action and their influence, as Anderson (2004) writes: “boredom takes place as a suspension of a body’s capacities to affect and be affected” (739). The bored body then is temporarily suspended and separated from the energetic conditions present. The trivial nature of the meeting; discussing trivial site politics such as what time noise (music/loud conversations) should stop in the evening, in order for people to feel that their voice matters and is being heard, made the meetings feel like a waste of energy. To avoid this wastage then bodies become closed off to the conditions for action, and thus its capacity ‘to affect and be affected’ is suspended. Although it is perhaps too far to say that a bodies power *to* affect is suspended as a concentration of bored bodies can breed further boredom. It is perhaps then

more that a body's capacity to be (further) affected is suspended, and they become more closed off to the influence of surrounding conditions.

This boredom was a disposition of the arrangement of the circle just as the bodies themselves. The circular arrangement of bodies in the meeting trapped bored bodies: not being able to leave the meeting without everyone seeing and disrupting the meeting. And the circle disposed the meeting to a slow pace because of the circle and consensus decision making processes emphasis of full (or at least fuller) participation. Meetings therefore become very long and unproductive through so many contributing. The shutting off from the meeting, of which boredom was one manifestation, led to a feeling of disconnection or mis-alignment from the group itself. Attention was turned to the passage of time and the end of the meeting, rather than what was being discussed and the meeting itself. Here then, as Anderson (2004) suggests, there was a fine line between the focused and embodied feeling of simply being bored and being hopeful about the day ahead. For example, while the neighbourhood meetings were often experienced as depleting, being within the circle, in the midst of activity and discussion meant that distinction between depletion and maintenance of attention and energy was a fine one, in contrast to a forward facing talk or discussion where the audience is mostly spatially detached from the discussion and activity.

The depleting feeling which can accompany activist meetings is important because it can in part contribute to activists dropping out of groups and particular forms of action. For example, one ex-climate camper described the change in the meetings from the earlier to the more recent camps:

Up until 2008 I was regularly involved in Climate Camp, um but after Kingsnorth decided that was that...I think the 2006–2007 Climate Camps I found the meetings like frustrating but productive and the actions that come out of them absolutely fantastic [...] like the Kingsnorth Climate Camp and there onwards I've found the meetings not enjoyable and not productive, and the actions that come out of them not really very good  
(Climate activist interview extract, Appendix F)

This perceived depleting potential of meetings surfaced in the other case studies, for example, the transition group adopted strategies to prevent meetings

from being draining and depleting. Just as in the neighbourhood meeting campers brought along breakfast, the transition group attempted to sustain meeting energy through the sharing of food, breaks in the meeting and strict time keeping, or through spontaneous breaks in the form of humour. I shall discuss these strategies in more depth in Chapter 7 (on ‘Activist Relations’). Such strategies therefore demonstrate that perceived depleting dispositions can be and are countered in conscious and subconscious ways. Through such strategies meetings can become livelier, or contain lively moments which signal and encourage the alignment to the conditions for action and open up participants to the potential for action. Additionally, some activists I encountered were more open to and accepting of the slower pace of consensus decision making and indeed saw this as an essential and fundamental part of this practice.

Similarly the visibility aspect of circles can also have a healing or opening aspect in much the same way as the “living attention” mentioned in the wellbeing example. As the wellbeing volunteer demonstrated when they described the post-traumatic stress they suffered following a direct action event, and how this was dealt within the activist group:

CL: How did you deal with it, was it just kind of the support of the group?

Um, exactly, yeah there were many other people in the same situation and we actually specifically arranged meetings, um where we could do a go round and all be heard about where we’re all at and stuff

(Wellbeing interview extract, Appendix C)

In this case this activist was especially closely bonded with their group, and this is therefore an aspect of the healing potential of the circle form in this context. Clearly then activist meetings, and sitting in circles do not always seem to deplete or close off bodies to energy, they can enhance or equally sustain energy through containment. Especially as contained forms such as the circle can reinforce the circular relations outlined by Bennett (2010) in the introduction to this chapter. In such forms the activist themselves, their bodies, can become part of contained arrangements.

## Conclusions

This chapter has sought to frame ‘space’ in relation to activist energy, through the particular spatial arrangements of the 2009 Climate Camp’s: site layout, wellbeing space, and neighbourhood meetings, demonstrating both the more-than-human as actors in the act of activism and the arrangement themselves as particular energetic dispositions. Here both the more-than-human elements, and the arrangements of which they (and the activist themselves) were part of, were actors in the act of activism. The arrangement of space at the climate camp often assumed certain universals in terms of energy, namely that arrangements designed towards equalitarian/anti-hierarchical and participation can encourage action in disparate subjects. Such arrangements could often form dispositions which counter-acted explicit human intentions, such as the intended empowering nature of the consensus decision making being circumvented by the disposition of the circle for boredom, trapping and exposure.

Additionally, I have highlighted some of the practices within these arrangements: drawing and re-drawing the site plan, role rotation, time-out, active listening, and consensus decision making. Demonstrating that even a seemingly subtle act as smudging or altering a chalk drawing can have an impact in the potential for action. And that the more-than-human were participants in these acts: providing their conditions.

This chapter has tried to reproduce and immerse the reader in the experience of initially encountering the field, and this form of activism (the protest camp), and a series of particular encounters with particular spatial arrangements at the camp. These encounters included: the establishment of the camp and its spatial order, encounters with the wellbeing team and space, and the experience of the neighbourhood organisational structure. These examples of particular moments and experiences offer glimpses at energy spatial dynamics within this space of the climate camp, and more broadly. It is especially apparent that the position of ‘outsider’ and researcher had profound, and perhaps unavoidable, impacts on the energetic experiences, creating in particular more exaggerated experiences of exposure and marginality. There was often here a sense of being mis-aligned to the camp itself, being as we were unaware of and

inexperienced in many of camps processes of organisation. Therefore an element of the conditions which stands out here was the affective angle and openness (or rather lack of openness) with which these practices and arrangements were encountered.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Doing Activism:**

### **Visioning, Building, and Inhabiting the Future**

This chapter focuses on the act or doing of activism. The previous chapter brought to light the role of spatial arrangements in the act of activism, and in turn the multiple actors present, beyond the human actor, within and contributing to the conditions for activism. Alongside this spatial focus particular actions were illuminated including: the active listening of the well-being team, the hand gestures of the neighbourhood meetings, and the redrawing of the site plan. Each act formed part of an arranging and re-arranging of the space by the activists and the clutter of the camp, but each also hinted at a potential future: an emotionally intelligent and caring future, and an egalitarian and participatory future. One of the explicit aims of the camp was to “explore” and “experience” alternative ways of living, similarly one of the overall aims of the Transition group is to create an alternative vision of the local future, while the Lammas eco-village can be said to be “living in the future”<sup>1</sup> through its ecological building and living practices. Thus the future was one of the most explicit themes running through the three case studies. Climate change, as the issue which connects all three, obviously plays a role in this prevalence, namely in relation to the uncertain dystopian future it proposes. The future was especially prevalent in relation to the acts within each case study, as the examples above hint, and it shall therefore form the focus of this chapter.

While all action can be considered to involve the future in some respect, the future is particularly pivotal in relation to acts of activism. Activism is ultimately about change of some form and in turn a new or alternative future, or a re-making of the future. Often activism seeks to encourage feeling and caring for the future, the assumption being that the cultivation of feelings against or for a particular future can initiate action, where emotions or affects are seen as “straightforward ‘prompts’ for action” (Horton and Kraftl, 2009: 17). Within activism the future frequently appears as a dystopia or apocalypse which can generate fear or anger and encourage action towards its aversion, or a feeling of

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<sup>1</sup> This is the title of a documentary that was made which revolved around the development of the Lammas eco-village.

hopelessness seeming to drain energy. Equally the future can take the form of alternative and utopian visions to hope and strive for, which can enhance, focus, and sustain the potential for action in the present. The future, therefore, is predominately discussed in relation to activism as a distant time and space, as opposed to a more immediate becoming, yet clearly both forms of future are at play within activism. It is therefore both these forms of ‘the future’ with which this chapter will be concerned. While the future in activism is usually considered in the form of the dystopian or utopian, the future weaves through activism in more subtle ways, and is not merely something which actions in the present work towards, it can become an actor in the present through the various manifestations it takes.

The particular actions explored within this chapter will be the acts encountered which overtly attempted to re-make the future and make present an imagined future. Through becoming present ‘the future’ can become an actor in the present, opening up the potential for action. I argue therefore that such practices can energise the present with the future, by which I mean that they can instil or restore a feeling of potentiality to present peoples, spaces and acts. However here it is the *process* of re-making the future which can energise the present rather than the re-made or re-imagined future itself, precisely because of the oscillation between potentiality and impotentiality. Therefore, just as Bennett (2010) argued in the introduction to the previous empirical chapter, processes themselves can be actors, such as this process of re-making the future or the previous chapter’s example of re-arranging ‘spatial’ elements.

In order for potentiality to be experienced there should be a sense of impotentiality, this refers to the way in which something has the potential to not be and to not actualise, to remain in between potential and actual. Agamben (1999) writes that without impotentiality potentiality “would be indistinguishable from” actuality:

[The mind] is not a thing but a being of pure potentiality, and the image of the writing tablet on which nothing is written functions precisely to represent the mode in which pure potentiality exists. For Aristotle, all potential to be or to do something is always also potential not to be or not to do (*dynamis me einai, me energein*), without which potentiality would

always already have passed into actuality and would be indistinguishable from it...so thought exists as a potential to think and not to think, as a writing tablet on which nothing is written...And just as the layer of sensitive wax is suddenly grazed by the scribe's stylus, so the potentiality of thought, which in itself is nothing, allows for the act of intelligence to take place. (Agamben, 1999: 245)

This state of “pure potentiality” to which Agamben refers is mirrored in Deleuze's (1998) analysis of the short story by Herman Melville: ‘Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street’. For Deleuze, the character Bartleby, with his phrase “I would prefer not to”, places himself in a state of “pure potentiality” by neither refusing to nor agreeing to carry out his work as a scribe, though he possesses the potential to:

It has been noted that the formula, I prefer not to, is neither an affirmation nor a negation...The attorney would be relieved if Bartleby did not want to, but Bartleby does not refuse, he simply rejects a nonpreferred (the proofreading, the errands...). And he does not accept either, he does not affirm a preference that would consist in continuing to copy, he simply posits its impossibility...The formula is devastating because it eliminates the preferable just as mercilessly as any nonpreferred...In fact, it renders them indistinct: it hollows out an ever expanding zone of indiscernibility or indetermination between some nonpreferred activities and a preferable activity...I would prefer nothing rather than something: not a will to nothingness, but the growth of a nothingness of the will...He is urged to say yes or no. But if he said no (to collating, running errands...), or if he said yes (to copying), he would quickly be defeated and judged useless, and would not survive. He can survive only by whirling in suspense that keeps everyone at a distance...The formula has two phases and continually recharges itself by passing again and again through the same states. (Deleuze, 1998: 70-1, emphasis original)

Bartleby's speech act could be considered a form of “implicit activism” (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) if we were to place it in an activist context as it neither

actively confronts nor resists, but rather subtly subverts. It is also demonstrative of the power which such a seemingly passive and inactive act can exert on its surroundings; in the story *Bartleby* nearly drives the attorney mad with this simple act. Equally this act demonstrates the power of a not-quite act, a not-quite-actualised act, but one which is very much part of the process of acting and action. It is this oscillation between potentiality and impotentiality and the power or energy of this oscillation, of which *Bartleby* is such a beautifully simple example, which I am interested in here in these examples. Because it is in this state, I would argue, in which an excess of energy occurs: an excess of potentiality and an excessive<sup>2</sup> openness to the conditions for action. Within the chosen examples particular elements represent this state of pure potentiality, much like Agamben's blank writing tablet and Deleuze's *Bartleby*, these include: the blank paper of the visioning workshop, the un-limed wall of a barn at the eco-village, and a collection of random objects in a drama workshop at the Climate Camp. In order to put these examples in context I will now explain the empirical focus of the chapter.

This chapter focuses upon three particular practices, the first being the 'visioning' practices of the Transition group which involved imagining and drawing the future, the second will be the material constructing of the future via eco-building at the Lammas eco-village, and the third and final example being the daily preparatory practices of the Climate Camp. Energy here is ultimately understood as potentiality, however within these chosen examples because of their aim in re-imagining and re-making the future, potentiality as a theme in itself was most apparent.

Each example seeks to re-make the future and immerse participants in a future in particular ways, these imagined futures can then be enacted and become 'tools' to act and mobilise around. But each re-make the future in different ways, in the Transition group example this involves the re-visualising or re-imagining<sup>3</sup> of the future. While at the eco-village the future is being re-made in a very material and tactile way, so that the future can be viewed and visualised but also touched, smelt, and heard, it can be a very physical presence with which to

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<sup>2</sup> The term excessive here draws on Anderson's (2009) conception of atmospheres as forms of excess.

<sup>3</sup> Re-visualising or re-imagining as the activist will have already imagined or visualised the future beforehand, but perhaps not for a particular or explicit purpose as in the case of the workshop.

interact and contribute. This literal building of the future then feeds into an imaginary rebuilding of the future by the volunteers. Additionally volunteers are immersed in the future via the future space of the eco-village. At the climate camp participants are inhabiting the future temporarily through the daily future-orientated and preparatory practices of the camp, the (potential) future here is both experienced and inhabited in the present, but also rehearsed and practiced through the preparatory and reproductive acts of the camp. This process of experimentation and experience encourages the individual and collective re-imagining of the future.

Just as the previous chapter, the intention here is to frame action in relation to energy, but this is not to say that actions will be considered in isolation from ‘space’<sup>4</sup>, as clearly ‘space’ and action are intertwined and inseparable, but rather the focus or lens will be action. Therefore like the previous chapter the examples here will also aim to show the multiple participants or actors in the act of activism and the conditions for action. The same overall structure as the previous chapter will be used here: three descriptive empirical narratives will be presented, each one preceded by an introductory section to frame the narrative, and each followed by an analysis. However, here an example will be drawn from each case study, beginning with the future producing practices of the Transition group.

### **Futures and the Transition group**

The Transition movement is founded on the aversion of an apocalyptic future posed by the issues of climate change and peak oil, a future of scarce resources and social unrest. But it is the creation of a ‘positive’ future, namely a more sustainable future with lower and localised consumption, rather than the aversion of a dystopian future with which the movement is primarily concerned. The reason for this focus is framed as being due to the problem of mobilisation or energising people into action. The movement’s founder asserts that previously environmental activism has employed catastrophic futures as mobilising or

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<sup>4</sup> As outlined in the previous chapter I reject the viewing of space as a coherent unified whole, which the term space invites, and instead opt for ‘space’ when referring to the multiple non-human elements which compose the surrounding environment in these examples.

activating tools, designed to encourage the public to take action to avoid such futures. This employment of dystopian futures, as energy tactics essentially, is deemed to have failed because the majority are not activists or actively acting in relation to these issues, despite the fact that environmentalism and environmental attitudes have become more prevalent. It is therefore argued, by the movement's founder that a change of tactic is needed, one which enables a shift in thinking around the future from considering the future as a problem to an opportunity for change, this in turn is envisaged as creating an energetic shift. The energetic quality of this shift is evident in the language used in the below extracts from *The transition handbook*, written by the movement founder: that such futures “inspire”, “enthuse”, and leave heads “buzzing with possibilities”:

We need new stories that paint new possibilities...What might environmental campaigning look like if it strove to generate this sense of elation, rather than the guilt, anger and horror that most campaigning invokes? What might it look like if it strove to inspire, enthuse, and focus on possibilities rather than probabilities? (Hopkins, 2008: 14-15)

Something about these profoundly challenging times we live in strikes me as being tremendously exciting. Clearly peak oil and climate change are potentially catastrophic challenges which can easily lead to our painting grim pictures of social breakdown and ecological collapse. It is easy to spend many sleepless nights worrying about them – many of us have. With a small shift in thinking though, such as that laid out in this book, we may find it hard to get to sleep due to our heads buzzing with possibilities, ideas and the sheer exhilaration of being part of a culture able to rethink and reinvent itself in an unprecedented way.

(Hopkins: 2008: 212)

Instilling this sense of possibility is clearly a vital aspect of the movement's aims and philosophy, and this is achieved through a figurative and literal *painting of new possibilities*, by imagining and mapping out the potential future. This state of “buzzing with possibilities” can be considered similar to the

state of excessive potentiality and excessive openness to the conditions for action, introduced in the introduction to this chapter.

Transition then labels certain futures as energising or de-energising, and in turn certain affects produced by these imagined and represented futures as energising or de-energising. The effect of either extreme of future, dystopian or utopian, relates ultimately to action; the action needed to avoid a dystopian future can feel overwhelming and unachievable, whereas the utopian here is presented as achievable. The apocalyptic future painted by the same issues previously is considered to have had a closing down effect on energy through the fear and hopelessness it fosters, leading to a shutting off from energetic influences, and energy preservation rather than utilisation. Whereas a more optimistic and utopian perspective is portrayed as leading to an energetic boost or “buzz”, through the increasing sense of possibility and hope. The future, then in the transition movement is both an end-point to work towards, and a tool for inspiring and energising action, in both cases the future is an imaginary presence.

Of the three case studies, the future was perhaps most overt in the activities and aims of the Transition group, the overall aim of the group was to produce a formalised vision of the local future outlining how it could be achieved (the Energy Descent Action Plan). The future also often formed a central part of the group’s more immediate activities including the group’s visioning events: the visioning workshop and the week-long community visioning project, and the ‘Future Café’ a monthly evening event for sharing ideas and food. Each ‘Future Café’ was themed around a particular issue, for example the first concerned low-impact living, namely the lack of opportunities locally for low-impact living. The event was designed to begin discussion around a particular issue and to in-turn initiate action around this issue. Community mapping was another activity of the group with a future orientation, this exercise took place during a ‘hub’ meeting, initiated by an action researcher involved in the group. The aim of this exercise was to map out current and potential connections of the group with other activist, community and institutional groups in the locality, and in particular mapping out potential connections between those not yet connected to. This exercise was in turn a precursor to the week-long visioning event as it allowed the group to establish who to inform about the event.

The first empirical example is concerned with the visioning practices of the Transition group. ‘Visioning’, as it was termed by the transition group, is a central practice of the Transition movement more broadly. It is considered one of the first steps the group should take and a practice they should in turn encourage in the wider community: “engage in a community-wide visioning process to identify the future we want for ourselves rather than waiting for someone else to create a future that we won’t like” (Transition Network, 2012a). The narrative below focuses in particular on a visioning workshop which took place in one of the earliest meetings I attended. Therefore like the examples of the previous chapter it is an example of an early encounter with this field site and the group.

### **Visioning: imagining and drawing the future**

Everyone else has started drawing but I was stuck, I wasn’t sure. What kind of future did I want? We were all sitting in a circle on the floor with our mugs of tea, felt-tip pens and pieces of paper had been shared out. I wasn’t happy about only having a red pen, I wanted lots of different colours, my future was ruined before I’d even started; I hated red. I hated felt tip pens as well, I associated them with school and business meetings with flipcharts. I couldn’t create a worthwhile future with felt-tip pens, I needed proper serious artistic materials to create a good future. Before all this the facilitator had told us to close our eyes and visualise the future, but my mind had been terrifyingly blank. I pretended to be mulling the future over while I sneaked a peek at what others were drawing. I was relieved to see mostly stick people and very simple things, but others seem to be drawing more elaborate and detailed landscapes. I tried to come up with ideas that weren’t already being drawn rather than properly visualise and let my imagination run wild. Because of this I felt slightly disappointed with my contributions, they were too attainable and too small scale.

Once we had all finished I was struck by how attainable and small scale all of our drawings were, even the larger landscapes. What also struck me was how similar these visions were to the typical transition town ones, from the Transition Handbook, especially the image on the cover of this handbook, and to the positive futures offered at the Future Scenarios workshop at the Climate Camp. They weren’t really radical or ambitious or imaginative. They weren’t

even really futures, they were pasts. They were about going back to how things were, to a localised community centred way of living. There seem to be a romanticising of the past, the impressions seemed to be that things were better before, we were all happier then, let's go back to that. Happiness and joy seemed to be a common theme. The bikes speeding along the extra bike lanes looked joyful, they looked like they were really whizzing along having a whale of a time, even though they were expressionless stick figures. With the exception of the bikes, life looked slower, happier and friendlier in the images. There were a few joke ones thrown in for good measure: setting up an alcoholic anonymous style group for 'car addicts', and a written vision of Tesco apologising for their wrongs.

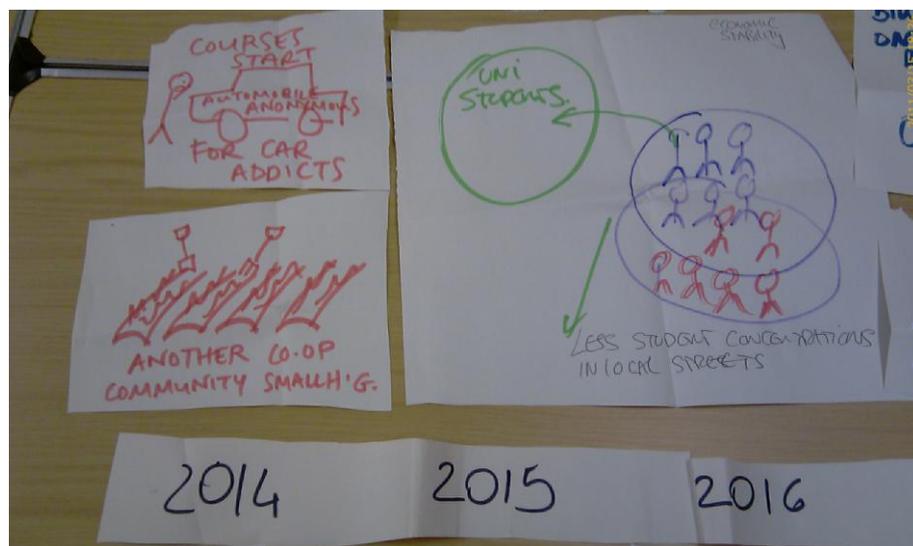


Figure 15: “automobile anonymous” top left  
(photograph: courtesy of the Transition group)



Figure 16: Top Left: Tesco apology  
(photograph: courtesy of the Transition group)

The visioning session itself hadn't been particularly inspiring or energising, mostly because it felt constricted; your vision needed to fit in with the transition movement and the rest of the group, and at the same time add to them. As well as being presented and explained to, and in turn viewed and assessed by, the rest of the group. I wondered whether the workshop would have been more energising if I had been more settled into the group, and in turn more comfortable and at home around the other group members. Equally coming to the workshop with a more defined vision, especially one which fitted in with transition ideals, might have made for a more energetic response. But the workshop did introduce the practice of visioning into my everyday world. One day not long after the workshop I found myself standing at the traffic lights of a busy road imagining what the scene would be like without cars, with just a few bikes joyfully whizzing by, or a pedestrianised street instead of a road, with people contently and leisurely strolling past.



Figure 17: Bottom left: bike lanes  
(photograph: courtesy of the Transition group)

### **Visioning the future: energy and potentiality**

In the Transition group’s practice of visioning the future changes from a daunting dystopia which individuals are powerless to prevent, to something which can be re-made and re-designed by the group’s imagination, creating imagined futures to work towards and implement. This plays into the assumption of an empty future: Adam and Groves (2007) write of the “illusion of the future as an empty vessel to be filled or an open territory to be occupied and colonised” yet, they argue “the contemporary future is always already occupied with the latent outcomes of choices, desires, decisions and actions of predecessors and contemporaries” (36). Another ingrained assumption is that the future is owned and shaped by those in power (i.e. political institutions, large scale companies and organisations). Through the practice of visioning power over the future is opened up, and the future becomes bottom up rather than top down. The future then changes from something owned by the powers that be, to something ordinary people are empowered to shape and mould, something to take back control of. In this example the future is also transformed in terms of scale, from a large scale apocalypse to the small scale of an alternative local future, a more manageable and more mouldable future. Additionally, the practice of visioning

here scales the future down to a view of part of the city/town and a vision of future actions and projects. These micro visions come together to create a bigger picture or collective vision, involving short-term and long term futures. A potential future then becomes a possible one; “Possibilities have to be recognised as possibilities to become possible” (Ahmed, 2010: 218). Therefore the main role of the task is to facilitate the recognition of a particular future, and the numerous aspects of this future, as possible, for them in turn to be viewed as potential futures.

The workshop was then ultimately less about the drawings themselves and more about the practice of visualising or imagining a future. A less explicit aim of the workshop then is to create a recurring practice or process of visioning, as the last section of the narrative points. But the act of drawing materialises the imaged vision, though it cannot accurately reflect it, it brings it to life and cements or solidifies it in the material present. In turn this materialised vision, along with the viewing of other’s visions, alters the imagined vision. We might borrow the visions of others in the group and change and incorporate them into our own. Or we may view our own materialised visions and alter the visions on which they are based as a result of this act of viewing. The materials used, as well as the materials produced (i.e. drawings), play a role in the outcome here and its effect: the felt tip pens meant that a cartoon and simplified, and in turn slightly disappointing, vision of the future was created. Therefore such materials are participants in this act and form part of the conditions present.

Within this example then there is a clear dynamic between the potential and the actual. The actualisation of the future in this example is not the implementation and realisation of the imagined or visualised futures but rather the act of visioning and the drawing of these visions. This actualisation while meant to increase the sense of potentiality in relation to the future to some extent, at least in this example and from this perspective, actually limits it.

Potentiality and actuality weave through this practice and narrative in several ways, some less apparent than others. Firstly there are the drawings created which are intended to serve as objects of potentiality and in turn actuality, creating future landscapes, practices, and ways of being to strive towards. The drawings created during the session did not generally spring up spontaneously during the visioning workshop, instead most were based on

discussion, plans and projects discussed in previous meetings. Equally they were limited by the knowledge and expectations of the participants. Therefore many of the 'visions' did not emerge from a cultivated atmosphere of potentiality but rather reasserted current plans and ideas already in process, aspects which were already therefore moving towards actuality and away from potentiality. The workshop's atmosphere of potentiality, emphasised by the workshop's stated aims and the preparatory objects (blank paper, unopened pens) and manner in which we sat (sitting together in front of our tools poised and waiting to imagine and draw), was a fleeting and not fully utilised atmosphere of potentiality prior to the act of visioning/drawing. The moments of imagining or visioning before drawing, where eyes were closed and voices were silent, was more a moment of recollection than unbounded imagining; remembering previous ideas, plans and discussions.

However my experience of energetic numbness was not typical of the whole group. Indeed many of the group seemed to find the workshop uplifting whether through the activity itself or the act of bonding with other group members (or a combination of both): as the activity progressed people became more lively and animated. Although I would still argue that despite this energetic response to the workshop the atmosphere of potentiality was, to an extent, lost by the actualisation of the future in the form of imagined and drawn visions. The workshop was also clearly influenced by the progression of the group as a social unit. By taking place in the early days of the group, the group's imagined future and individual's imagined future in relation to the group were unclear and not fully formed. Being more bonded and at ease in the group may have encouraged a more open practice of visioning. The 'space' of the workshop also played a role, that is, the multiple more-than-human elements present. The workshop took place in the homely, playful, childlike, and alternative space of a church hall which was used primarily as a Steiner nursery. The edges of the room were therefore cluttered with toys, artworks, displays, and tiny furniture. The group's playful and humorous visions can perhaps be partly attributed to the character of this space, but only partly I would argue: during my time with the group, which included a change of venue for meetings and events, it became apparent that humour was a characteristic of the group and one way in which the group sought

to maintained its energy. But each of these elements formed and contributed to the conditions for the act of visioning.

Many of the visions were intentionally silly or humorous, as well as those mentioned in the above narrative there were windmill powered buses, trains with sails, brightly coloured buses leaving ‘every minute’ to ‘everywhere’, to lighten (or to keep light) the mood of the workshop. A ‘light’ mood or atmosphere implies feelings of being relaxed, carefree, and ‘at home’<sup>5</sup>. This kind of mood or atmosphere then is one which is assumed to encourage action or at least an openness to action, as well as possibilities and freedom of action, rather than inhibiting, limiting or weighing down the group. As well as potentially producing an energising atmosphere, humour such as this can disrupt normative ways of being such as approaching the future with seriousness and anxiety. Humour is then a subtle subversion which in itself opens up new potentialities: more playful futures, where humour or silliness is not childish or out of place. The ‘silly’ visions were challenging the idea that discussions of the future have to be serious and adult rather than playful, silly and childish. In addition, such playful futures have the potential to become actual just as more adult/serious futures.

A very particular aspect of the present was attempting to be energised by the presence of the future in the workshop, namely the imagination and creativity of the participants. The silly or humorous visions, while characteristic of the humour nature of the group, reflected that this energising of the group’s imagination and creativity did occur to an extent. This creativity was encouraged by the clutter and busyness of the space itself as well as the personalities of the group members, including the drawing and drawing tools themselves. The effect of this clutter was that it gave the space the impression of being buzzing and bursting with ideas, much like the clutter of the Climate Camp. In some cases, such as the bike lanes, the drawings seemed almost alive due to the sense of movement they displayed. While some of the participants did appear energised in their behaviour, this was not necessarily an energising of their imagination but rather an energising resulting from being more relaxed and at ease in the group. Additionally, the group was instructed to appear less energetic at the beginning of the workshop; sitting still and silently and closing their eyes to

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<sup>5</sup> I understand this as a state which refers to a feeling not necessarily tied to *the* home or expectations/failures of the home, but rather feeling at ease and comfortable.

imagine/visualise the future, and this appearance may have been only that, an appearance of rather than an actual absence of energy.

In addition to moments of potentiality and actuality, moments of the workshop can be viewed as in a state in-between potential and actual, or even before potentiality: not quite potential even. The viewing of the timeline (the drawings were arranged into a timeline once completed) also invited the viewer to consider what was missing. There was a sense of there being ideas present which were not fully formed or written down, but somehow hanging in the air. It was therefore not simply that which was written and drawn, that which was actualised and the fully formed ideas, which became part of the energy dynamics of the space. The blank paper used in the workshop became a device for potentiality (and impotentiality) not merely a thing on which the future was represented or displayed. While the workshop, like Transition activities more generally, aims to instil a sense of potentiality, the actualisation of the futures imagined and visualised in the form of the drawings, in my own case, undermined the feeling of potentiality and therefore in turn the energy of the workshop. This is demonstrated in the narrative, for example the way in which there was the impression that the visions needed to fit in with what others had drawn and those in the process of being drawn. The potentiality atmosphere of the workshop was also partly limited and undone by the loss of impotentiality.

The transition group's blank paper can be viewed as similar to Agamben's blank tablet referred to in the introduction of the chapter, representing the mode of "pure potentiality". While transition's literature alludes to the energising ability of potentiality (Hopkins, 2008: see 'Futures and the Transition Group' section above), it is equally the impotentiality element, and indeed impotentiality itself which can too be energising, as it is impotentiality which keeps potentiality in the space or state of in-betweenness and not-yet. If the workshop in itself, as opposed to the longer-term effects of the workshop, can be said to have an energetic moment, or its most intensive energetic moment, I would argue that it was in the moments before, before eyes were even closed to visualise, just after pens and paper were distributed and we sat down on the floor in our circle with our mugs of tea in hand and our blank paper and coloured pens staring up at us from the floor. When we were asked to visualise or imagine the future there was a sense of restriction and pressure, potentiality, which suggests a

limitlessness, seemed to rapidly disappear. While usually one would consider a future to be actualised when it becomes a fully realised and material reality, here the practice of visioning actualises the future as the creation, even imagined, of a future in this context excludes other potential futures.

The material of the transition movement seemed to unintentionally limit the potentiality of the workshop and to have an unspoken presence at the workshop. The movement's central image of the future is the below drawing from the cover of the movement's 'handbook'. The movement's existing images such as this, which displays what a Transition future might involve, implicitly influenced the practice of imagining and drawing the future within the workshop. The visioning of the future also becomes limited to the imagining of the local future as this is what the movement's literature suggests as the realistic sphere of influence. Therefore another not-quite-present and not-quite-tangible presence and contributor to the conditions for action at the workshop, were more-than-human elements such as the handbook and its imagery.

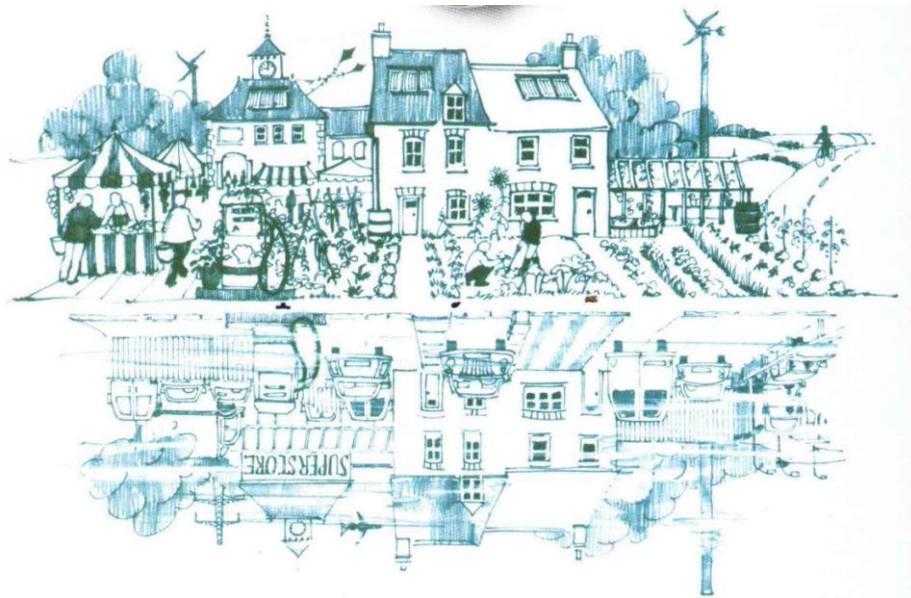
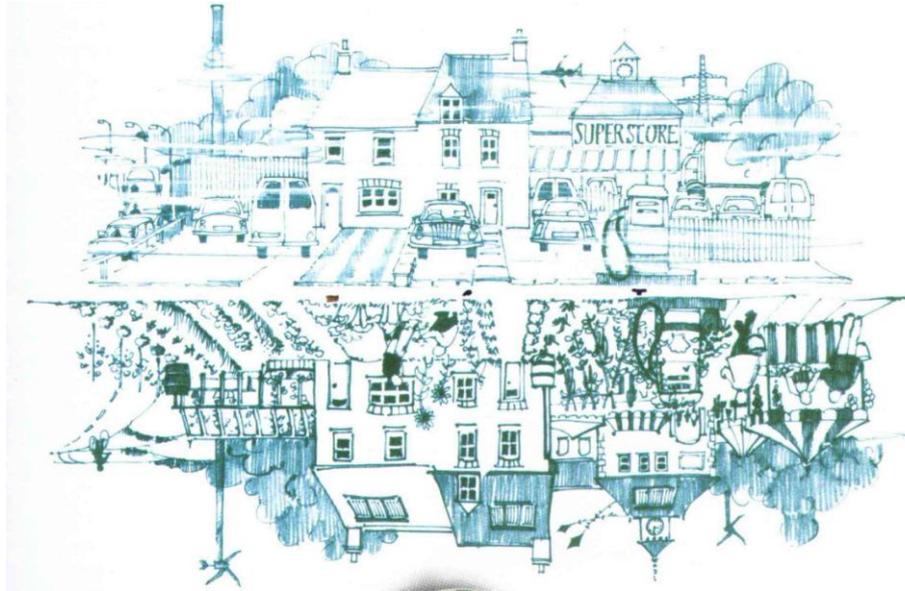


Figure 18 and 19: Drawing from the cover of *The Transition Handbook* by Rob Hopkins, below the image reversed to display a representation of the present (Hopkins, 2008)



I would argue that it was the removal primarily of impotentiality which caused this energetic shift. The imagining of the future was in this context an actualising and restricting of the future. The drawings which followed were then a further actualising and restricting of imagination. The future present in the moments before was not-quite tangible, not-quite solid or defined, it was blurred and open ended, but no less present. The tools of the workshop, when blank (paper) and not-yet being used were energy tools. But this is not to say that the drawings themselves were energy-less, many of them, especially when put together, seemed to be almost buzzing with life and a sense of movement.

The workshop ultimately aimed to instil (or restore) and maintain a particular feeling, one of potentiality, which in turn can be translated into an energetic feeling. It mattered less whether these particular futures were created, and exactly as they were envisioned, and whether any energetic feeling the visions did instil were used to create or put in motion aspects of the particular futures imagined. Instead what mattered here was simply the sustainment of this feeling of potentiality and in turn the energy for this particular form of activism, therefore in order to sustain, or continual renew, this feeling the practice of visioning needed to become a regular everyday practice, which to some extent in my case it did. But this feeling is not quite the excessive potentiality with which the moments before, before visioning, seemed to exude. Ultimately my future and practice of visioning was misaligned to the other's futures in that it was both not yet fully formed and in being not yet formed was out of sync with the group.

Therefore I was never fully, let alone excessively, open to the conditions and potential for action present. For, example, the drawing tools felt out of sync with my expectations, but for others the felt tips provided the conditions for humorous, fun, cartoon futures.

### **Futures at the Lammas eco-village**

In the transition example above the future existed as apocalyptic and dystopian, a continuation and worsening of the present problems and ills. Yet simultaneously the future was empty, to be imagined and visualised and ultimately remade. We see the same double future here, in this example of the eco-village. The future here is tactile and can be remoulded, remade, and reworked. Simultaneously the future was discussed by some residents and volunteers as an inevitable and unavoidable large scale apocalypse, the certainty with which they spoke of this future was surprising: “lots of people are going to die” one volunteer stated matter-of-factly. These contradictions can exist then because of scalar differences, from these perspectives on a small local scale, such as the eco-village, a town/city or an individual’s own lifestyle, the future can be emptied and changed, but on a larger scale (unless there is a large scale change of the small scale: a mass changing of lifestyles/ways of living) the future is fixed as an apocalyptic and dystopian one. The perceived control or power over the future here then has clear geographical or spatial boundaries. To accept such futures is in part a preparation for them, so then even this pessimistic prophesising has a function; it tames the future by preparing mentally for a worst case scenario.

Within this example the future is being physically formed and coming to life before the volunteers, and residents, very own eyes, and being literally moulded and made by the volunteer’s/resident’s hands. The future is both something to build and actively participate in, and something to visualise during (or before/after) the act of building, whether this be the future of the building, the site, or futures further afield spatially and temporally. Additionally, the act of building situates the volunteer within the futuristic space of the eco-village; a space of future building styles and methods (i.e. eco-building) and future ways of living (i.e. sustainable and self-sufficiency).

The example here is concerned with the building of low-impact housing at the eco-village. Here buildings are being built by residents of the eco-village and volunteers. The intention of volunteering at the eco-village is partly to help with the construction of the eco-village, but primarily to encourage others to pursue low-impact living through experiencing, building, and living in a low-impact way. The narrative below draws on the experience of volunteering for a week on an individual family's plot (the founder of the eco-village's plot) as opposed to the 'volunteer experience week', but it is supplemented by the experiences during that week.

### **Building the future: Liming and Lathing**



Figure 20: The liming trowels (photograph: authors own)

My host<sup>6</sup> made it look so easy, “you just do this” pressing the lime on to the wall and gliding it effortlessly along. This was the full extent of my liming lesson and it soon became apparent that liming was something which can only be learnt through practice, namely trial and error. Liming was used as a more natural alternative to plastering, using lime, sand and water, and applying it to walls in the way you would with plaster using hand trowels. The hardest part was

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<sup>6</sup> By this I mean one of the parents in the family who were hosting me.

getting the lime to stay on the wall, and doing so in a smooth way. I spent some time trying to do it the correct way; pressing and smoothing it on rapidly in quick, strong gestures. Eventually I found my own rhythm and technique, pressing on small amounts using the smaller pointy trowel. This was much more time consuming than the correct way, but it seemed to be the only way my hands could manage, as if they were stuck in a particular limited number of gestures and movements unable to imitate or learn others. This rhythm was interrupted when one of my hosts came to help and I was reminded through their practice of the right and better way of the inadequacies of my own. My hosts were very kind about my small section of the wall; saying that it looked hammered and almost sculptural, as if I had done it intentionally. Also adding that as my section was so bumpy already I wouldn't need to add criss-crossing lines to get the next layer to attach properly, although it was meant to be I didn't find this comforting.



Figure 21: Centre: my section of the liming (photograph: authors own)

I was very disappointed with my liming, especially as I had not that long ago been studying art and so should have been good at such things, although clay and myself had never got on very well. One of my hosts was highly trained in ceramics and pottery and so it was no wonder it came so naturally and they made it look so easy. What seemed to inhibit and restrict my hands was the fact that

each movement I made was becoming part of a real building, someone's home, but not just that, also a building on an important site in eco-building and eco-living terms, and therefore an important building in its own right. I was comforted by the fact that the layer I was working on was the undercoat to the final layer of the walls, and that while it would be lived in for a while it would eventually just be a storage building, a barn essentially. One of my hosts seem to find it amusing that I used this fact to comfort myself, that I needed to comfort and reassure myself at all. After all part of the point of self-building were the buildings having a more handmade and less polished appearance.

My hosts seemed to think I needed a break from liming so the next morning we moved piles of wooden planks, some around the family's plot and others from the wood cutting area of the site, here we loaded the wood by hand onto a trailer and then unloaded it on the family's plot. It was hard work, the wood was heavy and awkward because of its length, but it was very satisfying. There was a sense of achievement in seeing a pile disappear or accumulate, and at being able to manage alone the large planks and pieces of wood. I enjoyed doing work where there was a visible result and where I could feel that I was being useful rather than impeding things. It was difficult not to be good at the task, but I felt my relative strength and stamina for my size were of use here. I felt proud and empowered by own strength. On one of our last un-loadings my host asked if she could sing to me a song she had written, I said of course. Her singing made me feel awkward but privileged at the same time, there was something intimate about her singing her song to me despite us not knowing each other very well. Her voice and the song seemed to add to a sense of being almost in another world, and seemed to encapsulate the joy she and her family found in their life at the eco-village even though it was unfinished and there was so much still to be done. The family's cat sat amongst the young fruit trees near where we were unloading the wood, even she looked blissfully contented, relaxingly sat with her eyes half closed and her mouth appearing to smile. "She's found a good spot there" I commented.

The next day it was back to liming, but this time with the help of another volunteer who had arrived the previous afternoon. The interruption in the liming and the skill of the new volunteer seemed to completely undo my liming rhythm, though just as inexperienced as me they quickly became a natural, sweeping the

lime smoothly around the room while I pressed hopelessly away in my corner. I soon envied their more confident hands, which wasn't helped by one of my host's joking that the "race was on" after seeing my progress compared with the new volunteer's. My hosts decided to switch me onto another job the next day, presumably from noticing my frustration rather than my poor attempts, as I was quite vocal about how poor my liming was and how I seemed to be getting worse rather than better. It was as if the new volunteer's skill was sucking any potential skill from my own liming. My hosts were tirelessly encouraging and positive, but I was not easily swayed by it, I wanted my input and my energy expenditure to be useful and not to impede the development of the building. I was horrified by the thought of a perfect building with a terrible error or fault where I had worked on it. The other volunteer evidently took the liming less seriously and even seemed to find it enjoyable; writing 'Hi' on one of their finished walls.



Figure 22: the other volunteer writes "Hi" in their liming,  
(photograph: authors own)

In the main caravan (which served as the living room, dining room and kitchen for the family) the liming continued to be a point of conversation between myself and the other volunteer even after I was no longer doing it. We commented to each other that one host made the lime too dry, as if we were now

experts. And joked that there must be more lime under the house, which had fallen down the gap at the base of each wall, than on the walls.

The next day I began lathing on the one of the outer ends of the building. Lathing consisted of hammering thin planks of wood to the wall. These strips provided a solid flat surface for the lime to go on to and would enable the lime to attach to the walls firmly, anchoring itself by being pressed through the gaps in between the wood strips as well as spread over them. Standing on top of the high scaffolding, positioned at the top and highest point of the family's plot, sawing up the wood and hammering in the planks, I felt strong and powerful. Occasionally a nail would bend as I hammered it in reminding me of poor hammering skills, something I was corrected on (to my irritation) when one of my hosts came up on the scaffolding to fit the window frame: I needed to hold the handle further down and hit harder in order for the nail to go in more smoothly and quickly. I was annoyed at having my work space invaded (even though it was not 'my' work space) and technique assessed and corrected. I made a point of doing it my way for a while after they had left, until I realised they were right. "Do you want some tea Charlotte?" one of my hosts shouts up to me. Tea and lunch breaks always arrived too quickly, time seemed to fly on top of the scaffolding.

"Wow!" one of my hosts said on the last working day, impressed by how much I had done. I smiled although I felt I should have done more by now, but I was grateful for the encouragement. It was strange how one word could be so boosting. My other host popped their head up the scaffolding, "do you want to see the cards we made?" "Yes!" "They're great!" I replied. Most of the morning had been spent colouring in with the children, the pictures were then to be turned into cards to sell to the visitors for pocket money. It was a visitor day, a designated day when people could visit the eco-village and be taken on tours of the site in large groups by the residents. It also meant that I had the afternoon off to wash my hair which I was really looking forward to as it had been nearly a week since I'd washed it. It was strange how hair washing here took on the form of a luxurious practice and way of rewarding or pampering, rather than a chore. I was discussing this in the kitchen with one of my hosts while I was warming the water on the stove, they mentioned how excited their son was about the prospect of later on that day having an electric light (instead of torches) in his caravan. It

made us laugh because it seemed so silly and so wonderful at the same time. Things seemed so different here, and yet in other ways not that different: the daily school run, and the family day out the following day.



Figure 23: Outside of the barn showing the scaffolding used to work on, and my lathing contribution: the thin wood strips under the circular window (photograph: authors own)

### **Building Futures: energy and matter**

In the above narrative the future emerges, not as fully formed and finalised, but rather as in process and in the making, literally and metaphorically, and in turn a process which can open up and close off the conditions for further futures. Building occurs within this example both in a literal and metaphorical sense. The future in the sense of the eco-village, which in itself can be considered a future space designed to offer a future way of building, living, and being, is being literally built and constructed plank by plank, and nail by nail. But this act of building, with which the volunteers participate, also builds alternative personal

futures for the volunteers and visitors. The viewing and constructing of the alternative future of the eco-village opens up and opens volunteers to the potentiality of such futures for themselves. Additionally such processes can energise volunteers in the present, that is to say they can instil an open state to action and the conditions for action in the present. For example, during the volunteer experience week one volunteer beamed with enthusiasm as they described the work of living at and constructing the eco-village as “so satisfying”. Here the process of interacting with the future by being present in the future space of the eco-village, coupled with the process of helping to create and add to this project, is intended as an energising experience and practice. And, one which can encourage the volunteer to open up to new potential futures and re-imagine and re-make their own personal future. This energising potential is suggested in the volunteer above beaming with satisfaction and enthusiasm, this beaming is I would argue a form of energy overflowing (though not literally) and a manifestation of the excessive potentiality, and excessive openness to action and to the conditions for action, which I introduced in the introduction. This excessive potentiality, I will argue, is exuded by more-than simply the beaming volunteers after a hard day’s work, but additionally can appear to radiate out from the more-than-human elements of the space, especially when such elements are viewed collectively.

The future as well as being in process both literally through the act of building and metaphorical through the re-imagining by the volunteers/visitors, is formed by the multiple elements of the eco-village as a site in process and in flux. These multiple elements, while some less apparent than others as elements of the eco-village site as a whole, are no less important in terms of the eco-village site as a future space formed as an arrangement or gathering of these numerous elements. These various ‘things’ caught attention and became somehow more noticeable in this space, such as the colour of the stones in the stone piles amongst the grass, or the texture of the sheep’s wool to be used as insulation in the barn walls, much like the contents of Bennett’s storm drain:

On a sunny Tuesday morning, June 4, 2002, in the grate over the storm drain to the Chesapeake Bay in front of Sam’s Bagels on Cold Spring Lane (which was being repaved), there was

one large men's black plastic work glove  
a matted mass of tree pollen pods  
one dead rat who looked asleep  
one white plastic bottle cap  
one smooth stick of wood

As I looked at these items, they shimmied back and forth between trash and thing—between, on one hand, stuff to ignore (notable only as a residue of human action and inaction... and, on the other hand, stuff that commands attention as vital and alive in its own right, as an existant in excess of its reference to human flaws or projects. The second kind of stuff has thing-power: it commands attention, exudes a kind of dignity, provokes poetry, or inspires fear.

(Bennett, 2004: 349-350)

In the above narrative, just like in Bennett's storm drain, the things or matter of the eco-village stand out, in addition to the more-than-human living elements of the site. While they each contribute to the overall space of the eco-village as a future space, each element contains its own potential and impotential emergent and immediate futures. Myself and the other volunteer for example were fascinated by the family's cockerel and hens who roamed the site freely, and their free roaming meant that they could turn up anywhere at anytime, often in quite unexpected ways. A regular part of daily life on the family's plot was shooing the hens out of the caravan as they boldly hopped in, and they were once found in the caravan standing around the dinner table (on the sofas either side) as if about to have dinner. The potential for these unexpected occurrences, increased by each new act of the chickens, adds to a sense of excess, of excessive potentiality. In turns such unexpected acts opens up the potential for other emerging and immediate futures. Each element potentially contributes to energy relations, in addition to the fact that each element forms part of the overall spatial arrangement of the plot.

The space of the eco-village, and the particular space of the family's plot, as a collective of different aspects, things and beings, can be considered a future

space or futuristic space in the sense that it is presenting a potential and alternative future way of living. A way of living that is partly designed to, if not avert the worst of climate change, then at least to not add to it. Climate change was however one of many issues the eco-village was considered a response to, and was less important for some residents. For some the key issue was resource depletion, or independence and an alternative to competitive and capitalist ways of life. The eco-village could then be considered a future space in the sense that it illustrates a potential future, and an ideal future way of being, to different kinds of activists (e.g. activists more inclined towards social justice and climate change, or environmentalism, or anarchism and anti-capitalist, or combinations of the three). But equally the eco-village can also be considered a future or futuristic space in other ways, such as a future space in the sense that it is making this particular future present, and also the futuristic appearance of the site: its unusual design and appearance in contrast to current conventional architecture and landscaping.

The plot, and the eco-village as a whole, then can be considered a future space and futuristic space, through the combination and arrangement of different elements present: the low-impact nature of building and living at the camp, renewable energy, self-sufficiency, the unusual appearance of the buildings, the pace and structure of life e.g. consensus decision making and lack of hierarchy. These are main ways in which the space is presented as a future space, assuming that the future is imagined to be one which is, or is trying to be, more environmentally sustainable. This characteristic of the space was reinforced by the isolated and contained nature of the site (and the plot) making it feel as though one could be in another world or time. The future was made present through these characteristics and the associations made with them (e.g. the use of solely renewable energy being associated with the future), but none of these elements were static or fixed; the daily building practices of the camp then are in a sense building a future and adding to and reproducing the future present. The future then is made present through what is already present and what is being made present or in process and becoming.

This intensive presence of the future is made present at the eco-village not merely through act of being present within the space but also the interactions, dynamics and relationships between the various elements: the ‘things’/objects,

structures, landscape, human and non-human living elements. In particular potentialities were opened up when multiple elements aligned, and limited where mis-alignment occurred. For example, there were clearly moments of alignment and misalignment, or harmony and disharmony between myself and the building materials themselves. When I seemed to work in harmony with the tools and materials, and when I was surprised by my own power or strength, I became more open to the excessive conditions and potential and therefore more energised. Here the building was being made by repetitive gestures or movements in one sense: the holding up, pressing and smoothing of the lime, the measuring, sawing, and hammering of the wooden strips. Yet no movement or gesture was ever the same, just as no piece of wood, or batch of lime, or nail, or hammering gesture, was the same. The minor differences in each action and each material in turn became a new element in the dispositions for action. The tools and materials, just as the volunteers or residents, can be seen to have an agency, as Bennett suggests. They can disrupt and rebel against the human aims: the lime refusing to stay on the wall and falling down the gap instead, or the nail bending in the wood. Here the moment of potentiality/impotentiality is that before the act of pressing the lime on the wall or hammering the wood, in this moment there is the potential for the act to go right; the lime going smoothly onto the wall and the nail going in straight, and equally there is potential for the act to go wrong: the lime falling or going on unevenly or the nail bending, and equally there is potential for no act to occur.

Similarly this potentiality/impotentiality is stored by the piles of material and clutter around the site. There was an element of “pure potentiality” to these materials, how a pile of wood could (or could not) be turned towards multiple uses and acts, just as in the moments before liming or lathing. One pile of waiting materials become home to the family’s guinea pigs, their pen had been positioned next to a pile of logs and they had tunnelled out and now lived in the wood pile, venturing out for grass in the early evening. Just as the chickens sitting around the family’s table, there were unexpected immediate futures present and constantly emerging. Below are examples of the waiting clutter of the site:



Figure 24: piles of materials outside the front of the barn,  
(photograph: authors own)



Figure 25: clutter of materials and tools inside the barn,  
(photograph: authors own)

Just like my act of waiting for activism in the thesis introduction these materials are more-than simply waiting to be used, they are already being used: as homes for guinea pigs and other creatures, assault courses for chicken. And, additionally, such clutter is already part of numerous potential futures, where futures are micro acts as well as macro futures, such as the creation of unusual liming patterns. This clutter then becomes part of the excessive potentiality exuding from the family's plot. To the family each pile refers to a particular task and element of the building to be done, this excessiveness then ultimately only applies when the use of the materials is not known, or not yet fully know.

While my interactions between the tools were often one of disharmony and misalignment, the other volunteer seemed to experience an almost immediate harmony with the tools and materials, as demonstrated in the above narrative. The act of building for the other volunteer, especially through the harmony they develop between themselves and the materials and tools, alongside being immersed in the future space of the eco-village, seemed to enliven and make present their imagined future. There was a visible change in their countenance, although they seemed from the beginning natural disposed to a cheerful and upbeat manner, after a few days of living and working at the eco-village they too appeared to be beaming, much like the activist mentioned at the beginning of this section.

Their future changed over the course of the week from a vague idea into something more definite to be acted upon and initiated now. To begin with the volunteer talked about one day acquiring land and living in a low impact way, namely a small holding. This gradually solidified as a future over the course of the week, with the decision to stay on volunteering on the family's plot and thus learn more about low-impact living and building. The re-imagining and re-making of their future through practising and contributing to the low-impact lifestyle of the eco-village seemed to not only propel them into action but seemed to visibly energise their mood. So that they were I would argue brimming with the excessive potentiality they had opened up to. This state was, I would argue, at least partly a result of their acts of building and in particular the alignment and composition they formed with the building materials.

This fitted in well with the family's plans as they had just lost a long-term volunteer. Their previous volunteer had volunteered in order to take a break from

their normal everyday life for reflection on their own future. In the case then of the new and old volunteer the eco-village functioned as a place of transition to new futures, and to reflect and work towards new futures. The current volunteer had originally planned on volunteering only during the upcoming volunteer week, helping out with the cooking for the volunteers. As the volunteer week did not start until the following week they had decided to help with the liming in the meantime. The fact that the volunteer seemed to have a natural talent for the liming furthered their sense of enjoyment and achievement, they were able to finish the first liming coat of the smaller rooms within a matter of days. This coupled with the family's praise and gratitude seemed to energise and enthuse them. By the end of the week their future was being acted upon, they planned to actively look for a van to live in on the site<sup>7</sup> and part-time paid work in order to save up towards their own low-impact future. Therefore, here micro acts and elements of building contributed to the conditions and potential for a new activist future.

### **Inhabiting the future at the Climate Camp**

The third example returns to the space of the Climate Camp. "Exploring and experiencing [sustainable living] in practice" was described by the group's website as one of the four key themes of the Climate Camps:

Every Camp for Climate Action event weaves four key themes: education, direct action, sustainable living, and building a movement to effectively tackle climate change both resisting climate crimes and developing sustainable solutions. Because the future is not what it used to be...Sustainable living: exploring and experiencing in practice some of the ways in which a truly sustainable society might function

(Camp for Climate Action, 2009a).

This aim, of practising sustainable living was both to enable everyday living at the camp to be an activist practice, but also to explore/experience the

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<sup>7</sup> the eco-village advises longer term volunteers to have more sturdy (than tents) accommodation (e.g. caravans, vans, yurts etc)

potential future of a “sustainable society”. This demonstrating and practising of sustainable living involved: renewable energy (solar panels and micro wind turbines), compost toilets, grey water systems, recycling, composting, and vegan food. “The future is not what it used to be”, in the above extract, is an interesting play on words but is also implies a changing or worsening future requiring action to rectify, implying also then a pre-existing future or a future on course. There is also an element of the past hidden in this phrase; the future was better in the past, looking then to the past for a better future. In relation to the present, the future that the camp seeks to practice and embody is one which is seen as almost opposite or opposed to the present in many ways.

Sustainable living however was not the only future involved in the camp, several other elements or futures were involved, some implicit and some explicit. While the first element can be considered practical or environmental, the second element or future can be broadly described as social involving different ways of being with each other, including the collective sharing of: responsibility, energy expenditure, and decision making. The camp then suggests an alternative future both environmentally and socially, and is meant as a display of and model of the future, as well as place in which to experience the future in the present. The future was then to some extent pre-defined, but not fully formed. Instead it was emergent and emerging during innumerable moments of the camp, as a slogan from the camp’s handbook suggests “Another future emerges from the ground” (16). Within this slogan there are echoes of the Situationists (“beneath the pavement the beach”), but equally the world social forum (“Another world is possible”) and therefore the counter-globalisation movement more broadly. The ‘future’ also made itself know in more overt ways such as an activist magazine themed around the future and workshops on the future (e.g. ‘Future scenarios: science, permaculture and economics’). But the future was present in every act and object at the camp in more subtle and implicit ways, as the narrative below will aim to show.

### **Living with the future at the Climate Camp**

The first sign of low-impact living at the camp emerged in the form of make-shift compost toilets. To begin with the only toilets for women were the ‘wee only’

squatting toilets, which I couldn't bring myself to use mainly as privacy was in the form of a sheet of blue plastic which as it was very windy flapped up and open. More permanent cubical 'poo only' toilets were built from pre-prepared pieces of wood. Their more traditional public toilet appearance was comforting, with locking doors and a toilet style wooden seat with a hole in it. More permanent 'wee only' toilets were built afterwards out of wooden flat packs made before the camp; they had the same design but with out steps and had straw bales instead of wheelie bins underneath, and instead of a bucket of sawdust there was a bucket for toilet roll.

The toilets being labelled 'wee' or 'poo' only seemed to add to the childish silly atmosphere of the camp. It was necessary to label them in composting terms; the wastes would compost better if separated. But it also added a strange sense of ordering or power over individual bodily functions, as if the camp somehow owned everyone's bodily waste. The compost toilets seem to remove the sense of guilt sometimes felt as an environmentally inclined person when using conventional toilets, flushing it away so that it becomes something to deal with on a mass scale and becomes something dangerous to be treated, whereas here it was being reused and being useful. But at the same time being confronted with yours and others bodily functions; the sight and smells, was too disgusting and demeaning, and I found myself longing for the conveniences of modern life. I found myself going less frequently than I would normally and drinking less water in order to avoid going. Though it didn't entirely put me off the idea and positives of compost toilets, on a smaller, individual household basis it would probably work much better. I was not the only one to find the compost toilets unpleasant; many other people commented negatively on them, and this was especially true of visitors such as locals.

As the week progressed the outside and inside of the toilet became covered in flyers and posters advertising various activist events, protests, and workshops that were happening during the week, and sometimes people advertising particular activist things (e.g. one person was looking for some land to live on in their yurt). This clutter seemed to distract to some extent from the unpleasant aspects of the toilets, and seemed to make the toilets somehow more pleasant; the colourful collage of flyers containing unusual and interesting things.

Whenever I saw volunteers building or cleaning and changing (straw bails/wheelie bins) the compost toilets they seemed happy (smiling and cheerful) even though this was in my opinion the worst job on the site. They were just getting on with it and not complaining, they seemed unbothered by smells etc, just glad to be doing their bit. I felt the same when I had helped with the washing up, the almost joyfulness seem to emerge from feeling more involved in the camp and that I was helping out and doing my bit. This was helped by the fact that the other people doing the washing up were very warm and friendly. The washing up felt enjoyable partly because of the social aspect and the fact that we were outside in the summer evening air. One of my fellow washing up-ers commented during the washing up on how surprised they were that so many people who had been at previous camps weren't here this year. The impression seemed to be that the majority of people this year were newcomers/first-timers, accounting in part for the "different feel" to the camp which so many people commented on. The different feeling at this camp to previous camps seemed to be an underlying negative suggestion; it seemed to suggest they were less serious and less radical than previous campers.

One night when the 'wee only' toilets were in a particularly terrible state my friend suggested I used the 'poo only' toilets (which had been fitted now with toilet seats, making them seem more like toilets than the others, and they were generally always cleaner). Someone overheard or was listening in and told us off for even considering disobeying the toilet rules, she seemed as if she might hang around and listen at the door and then tell us off if we did the wrong thing, so we decided to take it in turns to make sure she didn't. The camp often felt this way; that we could never talk freely, that we were always being listened to, I found this quite oppressive, several times our conversations were interrupted to correct us on something. Nothing it seems at the camp was private, there was no privacy at the camp, something which was more maddening than the toilets.

The lack of privacy was a real anxiety for me, both privacy for myself; the tent was too small to serve as a meaningful personal space or retreat, and privacy from others; men urinated in public onto straw bales, they had some privacy from each other in the form of wooden screens between each bale, but the rest of us had no privacy from them. Some males I met used the 'wee only' cubical compost toilets, meant for women (though called 'sit down and wee'

toilets to be “gender neutral”), instead, in order to have privacy. This was all part and parcel of the communal aspect of the camp.

While the low-impact and communal experiences of the camp were generally discouraging of action in my own case, making me feel less environmental and long for my non-low impact lifestyle. There seemed to be another way of living at play; an improvisational and playful way of living. The camp seemed to be a place of spontaneity and possibility, often manifested in playful forms. Such as the smoothie bike: making smoothies from freegan fruit using a bike with a blender on the back, the blender powered by peddling the bike. Or the cube canvas which was placed near our neighbourhood meeting tent, this consisted of four sheets attached to a wooden cube frame to paint on and use for mural/graffiti/artwork/expression. People added to the canvas throughout the day, some stayed and painted for a while, layers and spaces were gradually built up and filled, when it was full the separate sheets were hung from the sides of marquees and a new cube canvas was put in its place. There was also the Mass Action Game every lunch time, organised by the Action Support Team, to provide training for direct action through playing and role-playing, here the whole camp became a playground with teams chasing each other up and down the pathways and sometimes spilling into the neighbourhoods. But there was also less official burst of spontaneity: football playing along the pathways, one interviewee was taking a break from a game of frisbee when I interviewed them, and one evening as we queued for food the people serving were singing together. Even though I was always on the sidelines of these bursts of playfulness they seemed to creating an energetic feeling which flowed around wherever the play went.



(Figure 26: The cube canvas, photograph: authors own)

### **Preparatory and playful acts at the camp**

Within the narrative above two pivotal ways in which the future was made present at the camp are made apparent. Firstly through the multiple everyday reproductive/repetitive practices that maintained the camp, such acts also served as preparatory practices that prepare for a particular future. Secondly, the spontaneous acts of play which could emerge at any moment or at any place. There was no right or wrong place for play, which pointed towards a more joyful and spontaneous future. Both practices made a particular future present by reproducing the future space of the camp. Specific futures are therefore made present through these practices but they also contribute to the future made present by the camp as a whole; a multifaceted and emergent future. Many practices combined preparatory *and* playful elements, it is therefore these practices which will form the focus of the following analysis of the future and energy relations at the camp.

The camp itself seemed to emerge from nowhere, to almost spring up from the ground as the slogan referred to in the section introduction suggests:

“Another future emerges from the ground”. But this emergent process continued even once all the structures of the camp were in place, in more subtle ways than its original emergence. The final photograph of the above narrative (Figure 26) is a good metaphor for the multifaceted and emergent future which the camp encourages, the blank canvases and blank spaces invite contributions, and are in a state of “pure potentiality” much like Agamben’s blank writing tablet and Deleuze’s use of Bartleby, as there is both potentiality (to paint) and impotentiality (to not paint). Though once contributions begin to build up they influence what can be imagined and drawn, as the photograph above (Figure 26) shows: the contributions become coordinated and share similar colours, shapes, and themes.

Much like the building practices at the eco-village, the future is made present here at the camp in a very embodied way, and the emphasis is on experimenting with potential futures. This takes place through the interactions of activists between each other and the more-than-human elements. In contrast to the transition group’s visioning practices where the future is made present through imagining, the future in this case is already ‘made’ and being embodied rather than simply imagined. Although this is not to say that the act of drawing is not embodied and experimental, but the emphasis in that practice is on the visioning and imagining of the future, the act of drawing is meant to reinforce or add to an imagined vision of the future. Whereas the emphasis here is on making material such imagined futures, such as low-impact living. Demonstrating that such futures are not distant imagined entities, but real material practices which can take place in the here and now.

The contained (and isolated) space of the camp, just like Lammas, coupled with the unusual appearance and practices of the camp reinforced the “immersion” (Anderson, 2010) in the future. The camp became a bubble, a contained space of the future in the present. Passing through the gate/entrance then becomes an act of transversing time, walking through a time portal from the present into the future. The contained space of the camp and its physical separation from its surrounding emphasises and reinforces the presence and experience of a future. The presence of the future at the camp gave a sense of being able to bring the future somehow nearer: that the desired future, in this

case one which is more sustainable and socially just, can be enacted now and therefore need not be a distant possibility.

The multiple everyday practices of the camp, which were rotated and shared out, along with the structures, objects and clutter of the camp, combined to make a future space. The daily practices or chores of the camp in addition to maintaining the space of the camp were also preparatory practices in themselves, preparing activist for a future where there may be compost toilets instead of flushable toilets, grey water systems instead of conventional plumbing, vegan food instead of meat, and so on. The camp then is a futuristic space, just as in the case of Lammas, if the future is considered to be one in which such low-impact living methods have become the norm, either through necessity or desire.

Preparatory practices then have a practical function in preparing activists for a future where such practices are necessary or desirable. Such acts therefore can enable greater adaptability should such futures come into being or alternatively can bring such a desired future into being. Many of the preparatory or reproductive practices at the camp became playful acts, either spontaneously (e.g. volunteers singing while serving food) or through design (e.g. The Mass Action Game). Thus enabling the positive affects and energies felt during such playful practices to be associated with these specific futures and future acts.

The practices discussed in the narrative illustrate a blurring of the work play divide: chores of the camp becoming social and playful. The labour acts of dealing with the wastes of the compost toilet and washing up using a grey water system to dispose of the washing up water (filtering the water through straw-bales) can become more akin to play than work partly because of the freedom involved (i.e. the fact that the labour here is voluntarily and not essential to life or compulsory). This is also partly through the way in which these acts become acts of activism, contributing to the operation of the camp (an activist space) and to low environmental impact living. Similarly the labour blurs into play at the eco-village where volunteer work becomes fun and “satisfying”<sup>8</sup> again partly because of this freedom aspect. The implication underlying these acts is that of a future where work is play, where mundane aspects of life can be enjoyable, and

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<sup>8</sup> One volunteer frequently referred to the volunteer work at the eco-village as “satisfying”.

in turn where life itself is more pleasant. This mirrors then the Transition visions in this sense, where the future is more joyful and enjoyable.

Some of playful aspects of the camp seemed to be unplanned or at least not formally or explicitly, there was no one telling people to be more playful. But that is not to say to was not encouraged, the camp seemed to cultivate playful conditions through the childlike elements of the camp: the ‘poo’ and ‘wee’ signage of the toilets, the circus style of some of the tents, the placing of the canvas cube to encourage playing through painting, and the daily organised play of the Mass Action Game (see Figures 27 and 28 below).



Figure 27 and 28: The Mass Action Game,  
(photographs: Amy Scaife (left) and Mike Russell (right))

The Mass Action Game was an example of a practice at the camp which combined all three of these elements: preparation for a potential future/making a desired future more potential, playfulness, and reproducing the future space of the camp. This daily game, which involved large numbers of campers, aimed to prepare participants for direct action through the play acting out of direct action scenarios. The photographs above illustrate the silliness and playfulness of the

mass action game. Much like Anderson's (2010) scenario exercises around risk, the preparatory practices of the camp have a performative and theatrical element which allows experimentation:

Exercises are based on the effect of theatricality (Weber, 2004)...the scenario enables a dislocation in which the user of a scenario is suspended between a here and now and a future. In staging, an 'in-between' opens up between the present and the future in which the consequences of the event can be experimented with. The scenario is therefore best conceptualised as a theatrical device that enables an 'as if' future to be made present.

(Anderson, 2010: 233)

This performative or theatrical element of the practices reinforces the presence of a particular future. The presence of the future here is not a literal transposition to a future time, neither is the camp suggesting that it is a snapshot of exactly what is to come, but rather that elements of it could be part of the future. This living of the future is not only meant for the campers, such as the bringing round or reaffirming of those attending to this kind of lifestyle, but also for those viewing the camp from the outside, whether literally or figuratively. The daily living at the camp then becomes a performative display of a future.

The mass action game then and the playfulness, excitement, energetic feeling exuding from the game participants meant that these feelings then become attached to the act of direct action, not only by those participating in the game but also by those witnessing its energy. The participants of the game appeared to be almost bursting with energy, as they ran eagerly around the site their expressions seemed to be one of pure joy, and this energy seemed to be contagious. By using the whole site as the playground of the mass action game, rather than it taking place within a marquee or a single part of the camp, the camp becomes a stage for this energetic display and performance, and has the potential to affect more than the participants with its energy, but instead potentially all those present or visiting the camp.

The assumption implied here is that direct action is more likely to be pursued, especially by those who have previously avoided it, if it becomes

associated with feelings such as these. Direct action then becomes an action which can generate energy rather than draining or depleting it. The mass action game then combines playful possibilities, contagious atmospheres, a suspension of the serious, and experimentation with the ‘what if’ of a possible future. Preparing for the future can thus be fun and energising, it need not be daunting or dull, this is what the game suggests in the sense that it prepares future activists for future activism. This is echoed by a comment made at a Transition meeting in which one member stated on that “dealing with tomorrow’s problems now” was “energising”. Such practices as well as contributed to the overall future space of the camp are specifically about influencing the more immediate futures of those involved in or viewing these acts. This is by preparing for and practicing such potential future acts of activism, as well as activating current ‘inactive’ participants/viewers into action, where action is considered direct action. Such experiences also provide a memory of acting in such a way which can provide the memory of an energetic feeling to pursue and to try to recreate.

The lingering effect of positive affects and memories from the camp was evident in interviews with activists post-camp, as was the energising potential of preparatory practices, an ‘energising’ which takes place as an opening up of new spaces of potentiality and impotentiality. One activist I interviewed attended a workshop at the camp on improvisational theatre, which sought to prepare participants for future direct action involving theatre. Here the very interaction between the activists and the random objects of the space becomes one of excessive potentiality:

I also went to a workshop which was, it was about drama and activism and it was just it really, I think it really kind of, it was a room full of like vague props and musical instruments and things hanging off the ceiling, and it was a really strange space. They started off the workshop with the people who were running it, there were five people running it, and not that many people came, and they just kind of walked around the room and did like improvised strange drama stuff, like making noises and picking up things, like if it was prose or a recipe just reading it in a strange way and interacting with each other and they gradually pulled us in, and there was no telling you what to do you just followed and made it up and

created it yourself. And it was just, especially because I'd been on gate duty all night and then done yoga and then did this like after not sleeping all night, it was just like such a different way of working and then when they gave us, they said like try and, like we made a short play about um, I can't remember, it was about permaculture I think, just how we interacted as a group after having done in that way, we just kind of all did things and saw how it worked, we didn't talk about it. And I remember someone who joined late started trying to discuss it and we were like "what are you doing?", whereas like that's what we'd have done naturally in another situation. But I don't know it was just, I don't know, I think a lot of things in the camp just challenged how you thought about things in lots of different ways, and I found that really helpful and really like, I don't know, like I learnt a lot from it

(post-camp interview, Appendix H)

There is an element of potentiality and impotentiality evident in the above extract. Firstly, in the sense that following the workshop participants have the potential to use, or not use, this skill in their activism, potentially opening up new ways of thinking and doing. But also in the doing of the workshop itself, the clutter of the "strange space" and nature of the workshop meant anything present could (or could not) become part of the workshop, there were innumerable potential scenarios. The strange random objects here played a crucial role, just as the paint and canvas of the cube canvas, or the football and frisbee for the random eruptions of play.

Similarly, in the second interview with an activist post-camp, they discussed the "empowering" nature of a road blockading workshop, and its empowering nature rested precisely on the unlikelihood of the practices learnt being used, in other words on the impotentiality element:

Um [...] for some reason I really enjoyed, oddly enough, the road blockading workshop. There was a workshop on um how you can use your, yourself as a tool for activism, and so you'd got the case where you might need to block a road, err for example you know stopping coal lorries whatever, not something I'm likely to do because I'd get nicked

and then charged for obstruction whatever. Um, but the, the workshop itself it [...] now I know how exactly I can go about doing that and that *weirdly* that was empowering even though it's not a skill I'm ever likely to use, if that makes sense, so[...]

CL: What just knowing that you could?

Yeah, yeah. So you know if it becomes absolutely necessary for me and I can rationalise it then knowing that in the absence of any equipment, any stuff, knowing that there will be people trying to you know take you out of the road, knowing that with enough of you you can actually still blockade a road, just by using some of the techniques they were talking about is, that was quite empowering.

(post-camp interview, Appendix G)

Impotentiality therefore played a central role in the energising ability of the camp as a future space and the future practices of the camp. The space and practices being offered were potential rather than definite futures and therefore had the potential to not occur and to not form part of an immediate and distant future post-camp. Much like the visioning and building practices, the trying out of futures at the camp in an embodied sense opened up processes of re-making and re-imagining the future.

## **Conclusion**

Activism is often measured by its outcomes, by what it achieves and what becomes actualised. Yet equally important if not more, especially to activist energy, is potentiality and continuously enabling and renewing this sense of potentiality. In particular states of excessive potentiality and excessive openness to the conditions for action, which while often only temporary or fleeting moments and experiences, can have a lingering effect on the conditions for action. The examples here demonstrated the role of this and other such lingerings, not-quite tangible presences, and not-quite actualised acts, in addition to the more-than-human, in the conditions for action. Therefore it is not only

fully formed and actualised acts which come into play and emerge out of these conditions for action. And of course these examples here reveal subtler acts of activist which too can influence these conditions: imaging and drawing the future, attempting to lime walls, using (the wrong) compost toilets. In turn piles of things, quite literally in the case of this chapter, are participants in these acts. Here the potential for action is equally the potential for more distant future acts and personal futures. Rather than the future literally being made present and literally energising the present, it is visions, versions and imagined futures made present, which can open up bodies to new potentialities and current as well future conditions for action.

Again the theme of mis-alignment plays out here. For example, in the case of the visioning of the transition group I associated future visioning with the wild imaginings of science fiction and was therefore easily disappointed by mine and other's offerings. But for the Transition movement the future is meant to be attainable and to be not too drastic a change from the present. In the case of the building practices at the eco-village I was preoccupied with the failings and potential failings of the acts I enacted (much like activism itself in which the focus often falls on the immediate achievements or failures) rather than the very uniqueness which building by hand (especially when by inexperienced hands) instils to the building process, and the uniqueness of the practice itself. But alternatively when I managed to establish a pattern and rhythm between myself and the building materials there was a feeling of opening up to the simple enjoyment of the act itself and the setting of the eco-village. Finally in the case of the climate camp my obsession with the discomforts of the camp and coping or living (temporarily) with these futures, and getting on with the serious business of being a researcher, meant that I closed myself off from the potentiality of the practical activist training workshops and the spontaneity of the playful eruptions.

In addition to the more-than human and intangible presences mentioned above, and just as in the previous chapter in relation to the processes of arrangement and re-arrangement of space, processes themselves emerge as an additional actor in the act of activism. In each example it was arguably the *process* of engaging with the future, that is, the process of re-imaging and re-making the future, which energised action in the present. This re-imaging and remaking of the future involved a rethinking of the future as something which

can be shaped by the activists themselves and by small scale acts, rather than imagining the future as *always* distant and *always* overwhelming beyond individual control such as in the form of the apocalyptic or dystopian future. Here each form of activism sought to open up subjects to the future and to the process of imaging and remaking the future, rather than reproducing the future as a space of fear and dread to become closed off to and to keep a distance from. An actualised or more fully formed vision of the future can limit the sense of potentiality and in turn the openness to action, such as the drawings of the future in the case of the Transition group, therefore it is arguably only by continually returning to and enacting this process (of re-imagining the future) in which energy and potentiality is renewed.

## Chapter 7

### Activist Relations:

#### Humour, Music and Playful Protest

Here in the final empirical chapter I will return in particular to energy as a form of feeling, which is how it is predominately conceived in human terms and generally as a form of feeling which *causes* action. The exploration here will build in particular on the discussions of affect and atmospheres from Chapter 3 (Section entitled: Relations: affect and energy), using particular empirical examples to further arguments begun in this theoretical section. I will then go full circle in that it was the affect theme and literature from which this research developed from, in particular the explicit use of energy in the geographical affect literature and the implicit use of energy in the literature on the affects and emotions of activism. The overall argument with which I will seek to close my empirical exploration is that energy dynamics ultimately come down to relations, relations here considered in the broadest sense of relations between human and more-than-human acts and actors, the conditions for action therefore do not reside in humans/non-humans but rather are a property of these very relations. Additionally, even in practices which appear so thoroughly and fundamentally human, such as human practices of play, the more-than-human still comes into play, still provides conditions for such acts and can still influence such acts in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

The fundamental role of relations to activism energy dynamics has been alluded to in the previous chapters. For example, in the previous chapter we saw how the performing of particular future producing practices were influenced by the activist relations between both activists themselves, and the clutter and arrangements which the activists themselves formed part of. For example, the visioning practices of the Transition group, which involved imaging and drawing the future together, were influenced by the level of bonding within the group. As a relatively new member I did not feel at ease enough to be fully open to the practice of visioning. But equally this mis-alignment was influenced by my relations to the blank paper and felt tip pens, namely feeling limited by them. Similarly, the immersion in preparatory practices of the Climate Camp was influence by feeling at home (or not at all at home) in the camp, which in turn

was influenced by the bonds which existed or had become established between the activists present, as well as to low-impact living or activist training ‘things’, such as the sights and smells of the compost toilets. But these relations are about more-than the relations between humans and more-than-human things, about more than relations between material things, there are also not-quite-tangible and more-than-material presences at play in these relations, of which the future, or more specifically a potential future, is one such example. Another more-than-material example, to which this chapter will now turn, is atmospheres, with the explicit concern of exploring activist relations (where an activist is not necessarily a human or self-identified activist), and in particular playful atmospheres and the relations to such atmospheres.

This very particular relation will be the focus here, that of a subject’s relationship to an atmosphere, atmosphere here being understood, as set out in the theoretical chapters, through the work of Brennan (2004), Ahmed (2010) and Anderson (2009). Atmospheres here are a particular way through which to understand energetic forms of feeling, which are in turn one element of the conditions for action and signal a particular relation to and presence of conditions. While this is the ultimate concern of this chapter, clearly numerous factors influence how one relates to an ‘atmosphere’, I shall try therefore to discuss just some of these aspects here through the chosen examples. In particular I will explore three different aspects of atmosphere relations: openness to an atmosphere’s influence, alignment to the particular intentions and feelings which compose an atmosphere, and the affective angle from which an atmosphere is encountered and perceived.

One factor which can influence a subject’s relation to an atmosphere, and which often forms a central aspect of discussions around activist relations, is the idea of group solidarity. Activism generally aims to create and encourage the formation of strong bonds and friendships between activists within a group, organisation, or network. The aim of these relations is to sustain activist involvement, which in turn implies a sustaining of energy, as such relations can support activists emotionally and equally can make the experience of activism more pleasurable. Another implication present in work on group solidarity is that such bonds, as well as sustaining activist involvement, can make activist practices and the experience of doing activism more energising (Collins, 2001;

Juris, 2008). Within the chosen case studies, the dominate way in which group solidarity and bonding were sought was through playful practices, which can encourage the apparent presence of a playful atmosphere. Practices of play can be considered as the most literal and overt performances of relations, as it is in such performances that bonds and ruptures, or connections and disconnections can be most visible seen, whether seen forming in the practice of play itself, or already formed and simply displayed and emphasised in the performance. Therefore, while these types of playful atmospheres are assumed to have a positive effect on relations, such atmospheres can both cultivate and disrupt group relations, exaggerating or reinforcing divides or disconnections, which can in turn encourage or hinder the ‘contagion’ of energetic feelings, depending on how subjects relate to the atmosphere. Though, contagion here is understood as openness and alignment rather than a literal contagion.

Play is therefore a central theme within this chapter, being the theme through which each example is understood and in turn chosen. Within contemporary activism more broadly, play has become a pivotal tactic, particularly in its ‘direct’ action form. For example, costumes, street theatre, and music have become common practices of resistance and subversion. However, this is not to say that play has only recently emerged as a tool of the “revolutionary”, as Jordan writes: “Since the beginning of [the 20<sup>th</sup>] century, avant-garde agitational artists have tried to demolish the divisions between art and life and introduce creativity, imagination, play and pleasure into the revolutionary project.” (1998: 128). These more playful forms of activism as well as being more enjoyable for activists and non-activist alike, are also assumed to be more energising (Branagan, 2007; Chvasta, 2006; Wettergren, 2009):

Although anger is an important emotion in activism (Taylor, 1995), it is not sustainable for long periods and can contribute to burnout. Similarly, audiences may turn off if they are continually bombarded with angry messages, whereas use of a variety of emotions (as in a good play) can create a variety of ‘hooks’ to engage people. Humour can balance highly critical, disturbing messages with elements of light-heartedness, perspective and hope. (Branagan, 2007: 3)

Energetic assumptions are therefore ingrained in play, and this is the case beyond activism, namely that play is assumed to be an energising practice. Play is arguably increasingly employed as an alternative strategy in activism for partly this reason, to counter the draining effects of more confrontational approaches, as discussions in the burnout workshop of the Climate Camp revealed. This echoes the previous chapters in which energetic assumptions were found to be present, such as the assumption that energy could be contained by contained spatial arrangements, or that the practice of re-making or re-imagining the future could energise the present. Energetic assumptions are constantly present, even if not always explicitly and not necessarily in isolation to other aims and assumptions, but they are important because such assumptions can play a role in how arrangements, practices, and relations are experienced.

Rather than play itself being energising, whether the enacting of playful practices or the relating to playful atmospheres, I will argue that it is the *process* of aligning to and opening up to the influence of such practices and atmospheres which is ‘energising’ rather than the play itself. Here ‘energising’ is understood as the opening up to the conditions, and thus potential, for action. Furthermore, that such practices of play can be as much de-energising and discouraging of action, as ‘energising’, where mis-alignments and closed states occur. Additionally play allows us to see more clearly these processes of alignment and mis-alignment, or composition and decomposition (Deleuze, 1988), and to see differently group bonding as precisely manifestations of these relations.

Three playful ‘atmospheres’ will be concentrated on here, one from each case study, the first involving the practice of humour in transition meetings to sustain group energy and reinforce or establish group bonds. Secondly, the use of music through group dancing and singing at the Lammas eco-village, as a unique group experience of the volunteer experience week, reinforcing the temporary and transitory nature of the group. Then, finally, the performative playful protest of the Climate Swoop, the mass action organised as part of the 2009 Climate Camp. Play is different within each example, not only in the way in which it is practiced, but also the very type of play involved. In the first example of the humour of the transition meetings, play is present in the form of the absurd and drawing attention to the absurd or silly, which in turn then becomes a shared

silliness or joke. In the second example, the collective singing and dancing of the eco-village volunteer week, play takes the form of the carefree, letting go of barriers and inhibitions. In the third and final example, the playful performance of the Climate Swoop protest, play manifests in the form traditionally associated with activism; play as a tool for resistance and subversion, and a way in which to collectively mock authority.

Even when not used to ‘directly’ resist or challenge authority, overt play takes on activist qualities for the way in which it subverts the perceived seriousness and un-playfulness of everyday ‘adult’ life. Jordan writes of playful activism as subverting the view of play as belonging to the realm of childhood and not for adults: “The playfulness of direct action proposes an alternative reality but it also makes play real; it takes it out of western frameworks of childhood and make-believe – and throws it in the face of politicians and policy makers” (Jordan, 1998: 133-4). In a similarly thread, Thrift writes on how play is seen as opposed to the serious “business of life”:

In Western Societies, the notion of play has been emptied of all content (Game and Metcalfe, 1996). It is regarded as peripheral to the real business of life, at best adding a little oil to the wheels of social structure, at worst a trivial distraction...What, then is play? Classically, play is defined as ‘as-ifness’: it is ‘not-for-real’ but it is enacted as if it were...Play is, in other words, a process of performative *experiment* (Thrift, 1997: 145, emphasis original)

It is Thrift’s broad understanding of play; as performative experiment, coupled with Schechner’s particular descriptions of ‘playing’, which define the kind of ‘play’ being explored here in these examples:

Work and other daily activities continuously feed on the underlying ground of playing, using the play mood for refreshment, energy, unusual ways of turning things around, insights, breaks, openings and especially looseness...presently, we need to stop looking so hard at play, or play genres, and investigate *playing*, the ongoing, underlying process of off-balancing, loosening, bending, twisting, reconfiguring, and transforming

the permeating, eruptive/disruptive energy and mood below, behind and to the side of focused attention

(Schechner, 1993: 42-3, emphasis original)

The use of play within these examples can be considered a ‘performative experiment’, performative in the sense that they are each enacting and displaying particular feelings, experiments in that they are attempts, trials and errors, that seek to challenge and alter the present mood and relations. Each example relates to a particular understanding of playing set out by Schechner above: the first example of humour in the transition meeting play is a ‘break’ seeking to uplift the mood of the meeting, the musical practices of the eco-village seek to encourage a state of ‘looseness’, while the playful protest tactics of the Swoop can be considered ‘eruptive’ and ‘disruptive’ forms of play. Schechner’s above hints at the energising potential of play/playing, he paints play as a well of energy under or behind the everyday, a well of energy into which the everyday occasionally dips into for “refreshment” and re-invigoration. But this capacity of play is arguably more dependent on a personal and broader cultural relationship with play.

I will now introduce the first empirical example, the use of humour in the Transition meetings. Just as in previous empirical chapters, this introduction will be followed by a descriptive narrative of the example and an analysis of the narrative, and this structure will repeat for each example.

### **Humour in Transition meetings**

The humour of the transition group reflects a wider move towards humorous and playful activism, but also the optimistic strategy of the Transition movement as a whole: to turn gloom and dystopian images into joy and hope, to turn potential catastrophe into a chance for positive change. Like play more broadly, humour is of course by no means a recent tactic of activism, and arguably activism is inherent in humour. Orwell, for example, wrote that humour “upsets the established order”: “A thing is funny when – in some way that it is not actually offensive or frightening – it upsets the established order. Every joke is a tiny revolution.” (Orwell, 1980 [1944]: 672). Although subversion is only one

potential effect of humour, Davidson, in her research, divides humour into three main effects, only one of which is resistance or subversion, the other two being social bonding and the ‘making light’ of issues and in turn I would argue atmosphere:

Humour, here as elsewhere, serves a number of ends. First, as is widely recognized, it is a form of coping mechanism, a way of ‘making light’ of difficulties, and therefore rendering them more manageable. Second, it is a way of affirming shared experience – the women understand each other and jokes emphasize this. Indeed, as psychologist Jerry Palmer (1994: 58) notes, humour is ‘a form of ethological integration [that] aids social bonding [and] the creation and preservation of group identity’. Third, and perhaps most relevant to my methodological concerns, jokes serve as a kind of resistance against my ‘authority’. (Davidson, 2001: 179)

These potential effects and aims are mirrored in the Transition group example. The employment of humour in the group’s meetings allowed for the lightening of the mood and the maintenance of an optimistic affect which the movement seeks to cultivate, especially as group meetings often involved discussions of potential overwhelming issues and daunting task. The group members though already ‘converted’ were just as susceptible to feelings of hopelessness. Therefore this broader transition outlook needed to be reinforced within the group, inwardly, just as outwardly to potential members and the wider public. The example used for the basis of the below narrative is particularly useful in demonstrating how humour was used to attempt to lighten the atmosphere and re-energise the group, after a fairly serious discussion by an activist from outside the group. Humour here is viewed as a practice of play and the analysis which follows will centre on the effect of humour in the transition meetings rather than an analysis of the humour itself.

### **Humorous breaks: warming to each other**

It was a very cold and dark winter evening nearing Christmas, I was one of the last to arrive and took the nearest vacant chair. Everyone was still wearing their

coats and scarves as the temperature inside closely resembled that outside, this was partly because the heating had not been on for long, and partly because the roof was not insulated meaning that warm air tended to rise and escape. The hub meeting was taking place in the usual place, a small local church hall which resembled a small cottage outside, but inside a nursery. Its primary use during the day was as a Steiner nursery, providing an alternative pre-school for local alternative parents. The Steiner influence meant that the edges of the main room were cluttered with handmade toys and natural materials, including shrines of seasonal natural objects and artwork the children had made. The toys and clutter, combined with the kitchen in the adjacent room, contributed to the homely feel of the space. This contrasted with the meeting style furniture arranged in the middle of the room: two low tables in the centre which were normally used by the nursery children, with chairs gathered around them. The chairs surrounding the tables in a circle were full size, with no arms and designed for upright sitting, and therefore became uncomfortable during long meetings, because of this I always found myself fidgeting and repositioning myself during meetings.

People chattered for a bit, and some went off to the kitchen to make tea for everyone, then the meeting began, I asked if it would be ok for me to record the meeting for my research, everyone agreed and I put the recorder in the centre of the table. To begin with the two founding members suggested an agenda and asked for any additions. A member of a similar local activist group had come along to discuss possible collaborations, and it was decided to let them speak first. They spoke for around fifteen minutes more or less uninterrupted, apart from the occasional nose blowing or cough. They explained the background of their group, how it had been formed by an enthusiastic and driven activist who had up until recently led the group, and that this leader had recently gone away for a year leaving the group at a loss. So they wanted to discuss whether it made sense, at least for now, to merge the groups or collaborate more. They commented on how people were often confusing theirs and our group as they both had similar objectives. They passed around a sheet of ideas they had had around possible actions and projects either for the groups to initiate or to lobby the local authority on, they emphasised that they wanted the group's input into the ideas and that they were flexible about ideas being changed or removed, or to become the creative ownership of both groups. It was then suggested that the two

groups have a social to get to know each other better, a suitable day had been suggested, this was then rearranged, and then rearranged back to the original date. They left the room to use the toilet and the room plummeted into silence:

There was a prolonged awkward silence.

“It’s freezing in’ it?” W said half laughing.

Everyone laughed, partly because it was obvious that W had made the statement to break the silence and he was conscious of this, but also because it was such an obvious statement to make. It had become a running theme in conversation at meetings, in between serious meeting matters, talking and joking about how cold the building was.

“Actually I thought it would be worse. But I’ve got something like four jumpers on” V said, laughing at herself as she did.

We all laughed

“I took stuff off when we came in and it’s slowly going back on” H added

We all laughed together again.

“I’m resisting, I’m keeping them on, until I can” V replied

The group members then started talking at once to their neighbours, but the group conversation continued as well.

“We had a fruit group meeting here a few weeks ago and kind of sat down and it was freezing, and then we stood up and there was just this kind of wall of heat, honestly if you stand up it’s really warm.” A explained

The group laughed and started standing up and reaching out with their arms to feel the warm air, we all laughed again at ourselves and the fact that it turned out to be true.

“Oh my god! We may as well do some exercise or something like that” exclaimed V as we were all now standing up.

“What we need is like a platform” A added, which gave me the absurd image of us all having the meeting on a stage in the middle of the room.

“High chairs or something” M added some more absurd imagery.

We all laughed at the idea and I imagined us sitting around the excessively low table on high chairs.

The laughter of the group stopped abruptly as the activist from the other group returned, the room plummeted back into silence.

“Just joking about how freezing it is in here D” said W breaking the silence

“Oh” replied D obviously bemused by our sudden outburst.

Laughter erupted, and smaller conversations start up again.

“I’ve got some comments on this [the list of ideas] that I was going to email out, because I saw it a couple of days ago, and was going to email it out but because I’ve been involved in this discussion before [D: yeah] sort of waiting to hear if anybody else has thoughts about this.” said T attempting to return things back to the serious business of the meeting and the previous discussion, people began to quieten and calm down.

“This? No I think you need a bit of a chance to take it in really.” replied W.

“I think it’s either we do something, it’s quite difficult to know what level this should be pitched at, what degree of certainty, or whether it’s just a trawl for ideas...” continued D.

### **Humorous breaks: collective experiments**

As outlined in the introduction above, humour here is a practice of play, and a specific form of play in the form of silliness and absurdity, namely the drawing attention to the absurd in order for it to become a shared silliness and joke. The humour here involved a silliness and absurdity, the silly gestures performed by the group and the absurd imagery conjured up, e.g. the group all sitting on high chairs to be in the warm air. An absurdity also lay in the group wearing outside clothing inside, and sitting together in a cold room when they could be much warmer at home. Here the highlighting of the absurd allows and invites the group to act out in a way they would not normally: being noisier and talking at once, and performing silly gestures together. This acting out contrasted to the prior serious tone of the meeting, as if seriousness and responsible ‘adult’ behaviour was temporarily pushed aside, similarly to way in which Schechner at the start of the chapter described playing as “to the side of focused attention”.

To begin with, an unenergetic atmosphere had developed in the meeting, demonstrated and facilitated by the lack of discussion, subdued body language, and prolonged silence which followed the guest leaving the room. To say that an unenergetic atmosphere was present is not to say that no energetic feelings were present but rather that any such feelings were subdued and suppressed. Then *things happened* (Ahmed, 2010) that paved the way for a playful and enlivening atmosphere: the guest activist left the room, itself providing a break from their discussion, a prolonged awkward silence followed, and a silence breaking statement was made. Wettergren writes of laughter as an expression of high energy: “Fun, pleasure, laughter, etc. generally signal successful interaction rituals and high levels of EE [Emotional Energy]” (2009: 10). Instead I would argue that laughter here signals a particular relation to the group, and to the playful atmosphere itself, namely an openness to both. I would argue therefore that the laughter, and increased movement and noise of the group were both demonstrative of the energetic playful atmosphere which emerged and fed into

this atmosphere. Additionally the humour here restored a sense of potentiality inherent in meetings, as one transition member described, face to face meetings were important precisely because of the unpredictability and spontaneity inherent in them:

There's something quite different about face to face meetings because spontaneous things can happen, and the immediate replies and responses to somebody's statement or idea are very refreshing, it can be very, very creative, and email misses out on that spontaneity and that creativity. (Transition member interview extract, Appendix J)

The analysis here will centre on the moments just before, during, and after, what I shall refer to as the 'humorous break'. The statement of the group member; "It's freezing in' it", can be considered through Schechner framing of playing as an "opening" and "break" in the rhythm of the meeting, but also as a tool for refreshment and re-energising; lighting and uplifting the atmosphere of the meeting. The analysis here will focus on these aspects of the 'humorous break', in other words the effect and way in which the humour was used rather than an analysis of the humour itself. To have such an affect the humour needs to be met with an openness, an openness to participate in some form in the humour and an openness to its potential influence.

In order for humour to function in this way, for participants to be open to its influence, there needs to be in existence some form of "shared community of meaning": "jokes can act as a perfect indicator of belonging to, or being excluded from, a shared community of meaning. If a joke is to work, if it is to be humorous, then we need to be able to 'get it', to understand what it means, to what it refers." (Davidson, 2001: 169). This can be demonstrated by the way the outsider of the group did not understand the humour even once it was explained as they did not have the same shared experience. This shared experience included meeting regularly in this cold building and the cold becoming a regular point of discussion and humour, as well as the humorous nature of the meetings in which humours observations were frequent and had become part of the identity of the group. In addition to a shared community of meaning, the humour of this meeting was facilitated by a certain corporeal solidarity: feeling cold together,

being wrapped up in warm clothes together, feeling the warm air together, trying to keep warm together.

The warm and cold air, along with the group's gloves scarves etc. were therefore 'participants' (Latour, 2005) in the group's humour and in turn the playful atmosphere. Particular spatial arrangements were also important and another aspect in the conditions for these actions, namely those which formed the focus of the initial spatial empirical chapter: containment and circles. The humour contributing to a playful atmosphere is intensified through the contained circle form of activists and chairs in the meeting, as well as the literal containment of the space. This circular arrangement meant that laughter and expressions of humour could be seen as well as heard, the joke was performed: hand gestures and standing up to feel the warm air. The importance of containment and spatial enclosure in atmospheres is emphasised by Anderson (2009):

There are two different spatialities being hinted at in this passage. The first – and most general – is the spatiality of the 'sphere' in the sense of a certain type of envelope or surround...The second spatiality is again spherical but it is, more specifically, a dyadic space of resonance – atmospheres 'radiate' from an individual to another...In both cases we find that atmospheres are interlinked with forms of enclosure – the couple, the room, the garden – and particular forms of circulation – enveloping, surrounding and radiating. Atmospheres have, then, a characteristic spatial form – diffusion within a sphere.

(Anderson, 2009:80)

The circle form and the enclosed space of the meeting seemed to encourage the laughter and conversation to escalate, reaching a peak and then disrupted by the guest activist's return. And the enclosed and contained nature of the playful atmosphere is further demonstrated by the way in which the guest re-enters the room and disrupts the atmosphere. The guest's leaving of the room was also an "opening" for the humorous break, a break from the serious discussion, as well as a chance for members to talk freely and as a whole group. When the guest returned the humorous outburst ended rather abruptly but

started to bubble up again once they had been informed of and therefore partly included in the group's humour. The silence on their return seemed to be mainly due to their return signally a return to the serious business of the meeting, but also partly their position as outside of the group.

This use of humour here fits within Thrift's definition of play as 'performative experiment' as humour became one strategy, of several, which the transition group adopted to prevent meetings from being draining and depleting, and instead encourage them to be uplifting and enlivening. This was after it was noticed that meetings were running for several hours, with few contributing and contributions reducing as the meeting progressed. The extracts below from an email discussion between group members, highlights the depleting nature of meetings, and the overt strategy to tackle this through various 'experiments'. One such experiment included changing the meeting format from a traditional meeting where the group sit around as a whole with a set agenda and facilitator, to an 'open space' format: the splitting up of the meeting into smaller groups discussing particular issues/projects and members can move freely and fluidly between discussion groups:

I often find myself slipping away mentally during 'traditional' meetings - unable to make any useful contribution and not really learning anything I can use either. And I think the 'traditional' meeting set-up can be incredibly intimidating and off-putting for many people - you have to have a good deal of self-confidence to make yourself heard, so anything we can do to make the meetings more attractive for a wider variety of people is a bonus.

Open Space, Appreciative Inquiry, Active Listening and so on will improve our energy levels and participation. [Name of another group member] suggested embedding some Heart and Soul principles in all our meetings - like starting with a silence and maybe putting in a pause for reflection after people speak

As you know, last weekend I went to the Transition Network conference in Liverpool. I returned home tired but uplifted, excited and inspired and

amazed at everyone's energy, both at the conference and in their communities. I agree that it would be good to try some different meeting techniques here in [place name]. These techniques can help energise creative energy and lead to action. I certainly enjoyed a couple of techniques from last weekend, and have experience of more from Transition Training; such as Open Space, Fishbowl, and World Café...On a plus, our assets of humour and food in our meetings were ones envied by other Transitioners I met. Many of whom, furthermore, had never gone to the pub after a meeting!<sup>1</sup>

There was certainly a feeling of “slipping away” described by the initial quote above, in this example. This was evident by the way in which other contributions, apart from the outsider<sup>2</sup> to the group who was leading the discussion, reduced in frequency and length, and body language also became subdued e.g. slumping in chairs or crossing arms.

With the exception of the ‘open-space’ meeting technique, the strategies employed, were not overtly or explicitly planned and discussed. But rather, they were experimented with, trialled by the group spontaneously, and then when these trials had a positive energetic affect which was noticed or commented on they were repeated and replicated. For example food was occasionally brought to early meetings and shared, it was noticed that this produced more lively and social meetings. This liveliness was seen as important both in sustaining group members’ involvement longer term and in maintaining the interest of new members. Food then became a fixed part of the meetings in which soup would be eaten half way through as a break in the meeting or a chance to discuss an aspect of the agenda more informally. This break in the rhythm of the meeting and the food itself seemed to sustain the meeting’s energy. Breaks in the form of humour was less planned and more spontaneous, but just as food it became deployed more often once it was noticed that it improved the group’s energy.

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<sup>1</sup> Permission was gained from each group member for parts of their input to be reproduced here, although I did not feel it appropriate (in terms of group privacy and preserving the anonymous nature of the group and its members) or necessary to include the whole email discussion in this research and therefore it is not included in the appendices.

<sup>2</sup> The term outsider here is not meant in a negative sense but merely in a factual sense i.e. them being from outside the group and from another activist group.

The playful atmosphere did not have a uniform effect, humorous and more established members of the group seemed more affected and more energised by the humour. This is demonstrated by my long-term experience of humour in the group meetings, namely I was more open to and more reactive to the humour of the group the longer I had been a part of the group. And for the guest activist, this humorous outburst seemed to reinforce their position as outside the group, and could therefore have a neutral or depleting effect on energy.

Here humour is used as 'refreshment', as forms of play so often are (Schechner, 1993), and provides an opening for play and the formation of a playful atmosphere, breaking from the serious mood of the meeting which had developed. In order to be affected by such an atmosphere subjects needed to be open to this humour and therefore open to its influence. This openness to the potentially energising experience of humour here involved several aspects, including the shared community of meaning in relation to the humour itself. The rhythm and spatial arrangement of the meeting also facilitated an openness to humour. The rhythmic aspect involved the outsider taking a break from the meeting and leaving the space of the meeting, and this break in the rhythm of the meeting becoming an opening and invitation to a change of topic and mood. The spatial arrangement of the meeting included the coldness of the meeting space becoming a shared feeling, and the circle arrangement of the chairs allowing humour to be seen as well as heard, and performed.

The next section will introduce the discussion of the second empirical example of the chapter; the musical practices of the volunteer experience week at the Lammas eco-village. This introduction will again be followed by a descriptive narrative of the examples and an analysis of the narrative.

### **Music at the Lammas eco-village**

The embodiment of music, through singing and dancing, occurred within both the Lammas and Climate Camp case studies as a tool for group play and in turn group bonding. Indeed, music has become a common tactic of activism more broadly, from protest songs and samba band accompanied marches such as the example with which this thesis began (The Carnival of Climate Chaos), to the

evening social bonding activities of both Climate Camp and Mainhill Solidarity Camp. Singing occurred at these 'direct action' camps both in the form of more planned activities such as singing around camps fires, and also in more spontaneous ways, for example my companions singing (climate camp campfire songs) on the car journey back from the Climate Swoop and activists singing while serving food at the Climate Camp. At the Lammas eco-village volunteer week, the presence and use of music coincided with significant bonding events. Music was generally absent from the transition group activities with its use being associated, in the context of this research, primarily with direct action or social and winding down events.

The two key music orientated events of the Lammas volunteer experience week, which will be discussed in the narrative below, were the collective singing in the minibus on the drive back from a group excursion and the celebration organised for the volunteers the night before the final day. The events below are examples of two of the evening activities of the volunteer week, the volunteer coordinator arranged different social activities for each evening we were there. The first evening was spent huddled around the camp fire, much like the last evening described below, subsequent evening activities included socialising around the fireplace in the farm house, story-telling, and a film night.

These practices described below were chosen for the way in which they stood out from the other experiences of the volunteer week. Additionally they reflect the unusualness and intensity of both the volunteer experience week and life at the eco-village more generally. Play as a mood and mode of being seem to be more common place at the eco-village than the everyday urban spaces I was used to. The examples were therefore chosen to demonstrate this overall element of the experience of being at the eco-village.

### **Circle dancing and singing at the volunteer week**

I thought it was just me at first, finding it hard to concentrate and getting distracted by my tea and where I could put it where it wouldn't get knocked over, but I noticed the volunteer next to me getting restless and two other volunteers had disappeared completely, they had sneaked out presumably for a cigarette and had not come back. Later on we found them in the pub. That evening had been

spent listening to a panel discussion on environmental issues in a nearby town's community centre. The excursion had been built up into an important event by the volunteer coordinator who raved about a particular speaker, a local politician, who she admired and who had been very supportive of the eco-village project. So we were all eager to go, and some had even dressed up, wearing clean tops and non-muddy shoes. We thought it would be more of a social event to meet local environmental people rather than a serious talk. On the bumpy mini-bus ride there we had tried to eat the pizza the coordinator had prepared for us as there wasn't time to sit down to a meal in the farmhouse, as we usually did in the evenings, but this proved more trouble than it was worth as the pizza was so thick and crumbly, and I could never stomach much food on bumpy car journeys. Others persevered or switched to just eating the garlic bread being shared round.

After what felt like days later we emerged from the community centre and set off in the direction of the nearest pub, where we were reunited with the other volunteers. We gathered ourselves round a large table to share stories from the day and built roundhouse<sup>3</sup> roofs out of beer mats.



Figure 29: A mini version of a roundhouse roof made of beer mats  
(photograph: Sylvia<sup>4</sup>)

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<sup>3</sup> A roundhouse is a form of low-impact building with a self-supporting circular roof, one had already been built at the eco-village and another was in the process of being built and some of us had spent the day helping with the new roundhouse.

<sup>4</sup> Permission was gained to reproduce Sylvia's photos under her first name, she was another volunteer at the experience week and keen photographer.

Soon it was time to head back. We walked together back to the mini-bus to start the long journey back to the eco-village in the dark. To pass the time one of the volunteers begged the coordinator to sing to us, knowing that she had a beautiful singing voice. She encouraged us all to sing along with her once we knew the words. It was easy to join in knowing that your voice would merge with the others and it would have felt more embarrassing to not sing. There was to some extent a pressure to join in and sing, but only partly, because I had always enjoyed singing. It was a liberating experience, singing at the top of my voice, and not caring what I sounded like, or whether I was out of tune as I couldn't hear my own voice. It reminded me of being a child and singing with my family on long car journeys. Our combined sound and the sound of others voices around me seem to almost pass through me, as if we were all immersed in the sound.

Later in the week, during the evening of the penultimate day, the volunteer coordinator had arranged a celebration for us with the eco-village residents and their friends. To begin with we all sat round the camp fire talking and watching the embers flicker. As more people arrived and it started to get dark, so that the only light came from the campfire, it was decided that it was time for some dancing. I was very against dancing at first but another volunteer implied that I was an observer rather than a doer, and this was enough motivation for me. I wanted to prove them wrong more than I actually wanted to dance.



Figure 30: The burning embers of the campfire (photograph: Sylvia)

Several musicians had come to the celebration including a guitarist and violinist, and as they prepared a friend of the coordinator taught us all a dance routine. It was a kind of Ceilidh dancing also called ‘circle dancing’ as it involved a lot of dancing in circles, it was essentially traditional country dancing. The routines were quite simple but in the confusion we all constantly got it wrong, going in the wrong direction, doing the wrong step, bumping into others. This became part of the fun, getting it wrong together, as well as the energetic rhythm of the music. This shared focus on each other and the dance seem to make the surrounding space disappear, as if the music was not coming from somewhere separate but was instead part of our movements. There was also an exhilaration from our movements when we got them right, such as rapidly dancing in a circle linked arm with another with such force that you felt you might spin off and fly across the field, making you hold on to the others arms partly for safety as well as for the dance. The dance lost its buzz once I ended up being paired with a child who had decided to join in, because of my height, so that the dance began to feel more like baby-sitting than dancing. After this dance had finished I got some water and collapsed onto the grass by the camp fire.

### **Musical compositions and decompositions**

As with many of my examples I began the above narrative, and the experience of the eco-village volunteer week overall, as an (self-assigned) outsider, but there were moments of what Deleuze (1988) might term ‘composition’ and ‘decomposition’ as a result of these playful practices. This culminated in an increasing, both in duration and intensity, of such moments of composition with the other group members and practices taking place. Again, here the music related practices of singing and dancing are very particular forms of play, forms of play which encourage a carefree uninhibited state of being.

The analysis here will focus on the idea of alignment; becoming aligned with a particular group, space, and moment, through particular practices. The group singing and dancing being the particular practices here, how then such practices can encourage a sense of alignment and in turn the feeling of a shared atmosphere; in this case a playful atmosphere. As well as the idea of looseness,

which play of this form promotes. Here, the term of ‘aligned’ is drawn from the work of Ahmed:

I have suggested that happiness is attributed to certain objects that circulate as social goods. When we feel pleasure from such objects, we are aligned; we are facing the right way. We become alienated – out of line with an affective community – when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are already attributed as being good. (Ahmed, 2010: 37)

Similarly, practices of play are expected to generate particular energies and affects, and when a subject does not feel what they are expected to, or what they observe in others, there can also be a feeling of alienation and misalignment. Ahmed’s alignment can, I would argue, be considered similar to Deleuze’s ‘composition’ and ‘decomposition’ as a result of bodily ‘encounters’:

When a body “encounters” another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts...as conscious beings, we never apprehend anything but the *effects* of these compositions and decompositions: we experience *joy* when a body encounters ours and enters into composition with it, and *sadness* when, on the contrary, a body or an idea threaten our own coherence. We are in a condition such that we only take in “what happens” to our body, “what happens” to our mind, that is, the effect of a body on our body, the effect of an idea on our idea.

(Deleuze, 1988: 19, emphasis original)

To be aligned with another, or others, is to feel the same or similar affects and similar intensities of such affects, within a particular space-time, which in turn creates an openness; being open to the energising feelings which can result from this alignment. The creation of atmospheres, and energy contagion, therefore require some alignment between subjects. Given the complexities discussed above, energetic atmospheres here are not conceived as solid coherent

masses in which surroundings and subjects become submerged. But, rather, particular ‘micro-atmospheres’ become aligned or mis-aligned and this can influence the energetic feelings experienced.

The alignment or mis-alignment of ‘micro-atmospheres’ is not a simple adding together, such atmospheres can combine or align to create something more-than or rather separate from the sum of the atmospheres considered separately; much in the way that Bennett talks of energy assemblages as being different from the energy of each element in the first empirical chapter. Similarly, Brennan writing on affective transmission highlights the complexity of such transmission; when an emotion (or micro-atmosphere) encounters another they do not simply combine but neither do they remain unaffected by the encounter: “the emotions of two are not the same as the emotions of one plus one. If I emit one emotion and you emit another, we may both of us take onboard the effect of this new composite” (Brennan, 2004: 51).

As mentioned previously, dance and singing are understood in this context as forms of play. To consider these practices as play is not to say that they cannot have an intense and moving effect, this is clearly evident in the narrative above in which both practices seemed to lift participants up to somewhere else. Similarly, Jasper writes of the way in which singing and dancing in activism can transport “participants onto another plane”:

*Singing and dancing are two activities often found in rituals, providing the requisite emotional charge through music, coordinated physical activity, and bodily contact. Since Emile Durkheim first described "collective effervescence," it has been clear that these activities are crucial in creating it, in transporting participants onto another plane, into what they feel is a more ethereal, or at any rate different, reality* (Jasper, 1999: 192, emphasis original)

This feeling is reinforced by the contained spatial forms of the practices; the circle dancing involving facing and concentrating on each others movements, and the contained space of the mini-bus both literally containing the group’s voices and containing and therefore intensifying the experience. This effect is one way in which a sense of alignment and unity can be felt, thus creating a

shared atmosphere. Jasper refers to such practices as the “kernel of truth in crowd theories”:

In many ways, singing and dancing (and other forms of coordinated movement, from marches to human chains) are the kernel of truth in crowd theories, the one moment when a large group can attain a certain coordination and unity, can silence the small groups talking among themselves, can concentrate the attention of all. (Jasper, 1999: 193)

The transporting feeling was to some extent also reinforced by the temporary, and therefore fleeting and precious, nature of the volunteer group; being brought together randomly for the fixed time frame of the volunteer week. Yet simultaneously, and contradictory, this temporary nature of the group also seemed to undermine the feeling of “affective solidarity” (Juris, 2008) produced by the practices. As Juris writes “performative rituals” of activism such as these can “amplifying an initiating emotion” (65), in the case the unusual practices of singing and circle dancing together as a group can amplify the feeling of the group as temporary and therefore not a group in any real long-term sense.

However, overall the pleasures experienced during these events, such as the feelings discussed above, had an energising effect. To use myself as an example, while at the end of the dance (and narrative) I collapse onto the grass this was not as a result of feeling depleted or de-energised. I in fact felt very energised and exhilarated, while at the start of the evening I had felt quite subdued and not wanted to join in with the dancing. Afterwards my feelings were similar to Collins (2004) description of high emotional energy: “This socially derived emotional energy, as Durkheim says, is a feeling of confidence, courage to take action, boldness in taking initiative” (Collins, 2004: 39). I felt boosted and more confident and as result initiated a conversation with the stranger sitting on the grass next to me, who like me had been dancing. Whereas my mood before the dance meant that I would not have felt able to do this.

Play is often an overt practice of bonding, yet this narrative clearly shows other less active and enjoyable experience can contribute to group bonding. At the beginning of the narrative the experience of being bored together by the panel discussion became a practice of bonding, but in this instance only once it was

recognised that others were also bored, and also mostly during the period after being bored when the experience was joked about and played on, and thus became a collective or in-joke. This echoes the concept of a “shared community of meaning” (Davidson, 2001) mentioned in the above example of humour at the Transition meetings. Similarly, the lyrics of the songs on the mini bus became a form of shared meaning: “lyrics are a form of shared knowledge that helps one feel like an insider.” (Jasper, 1999: 193).

Additionally, there are individual meanings, memories, and associations which come into play in these experiences. For example, the mini-bus singing is influenced in my own case by the past experiences it resembles: singing on a coach on the way to or from a school trip, and singing with my family on long car journeys. Therefore singing in this context is reminiscent of childhood, childlike joy and pleasure in singing, and childlike lack of inhibitions. It also reinforces a feeling of being in or belonging to a particular grouping, a family and school year group in the case of past experiences, and in the case of the eco-village the particular volunteer group unique to that week. This uniqueness combined with the intimacy of singing together and to each other, creates a feeling of privilege and importance in being part of such a moment. The temporary nature of the group and experience therefore exaggerated the affect which such moments could have. A common phrase used to describe the experience of being part of the group and the experience of the volunteer week was “intense”, meant both in a positive and negative sense.

The joyful feelings experienced during these events, and the shared and personal meanings present, were just some aspects contributing to the overall playful atmosphere. Play here is primarily in the form of what Schechner refers to as a ‘looseness’ or loosening:

Work and other daily activities continuously feed on the underlying ground of playing, using the play mood for refreshment, energy, unusual ways of turning things around, insights, breaks, openings and *especially looseness*. This looseness (pliability, bending, lability, unfocused attention, the long way around) is implied in such phrases ‘play it out’ or ‘there’s some play in the rope’ or ‘play around with the idea’. Looseness

encourages the discovery of new configurations and twists of ideas and experiences.

(Schechner, 1993: 42, my emphasis)

Looseness implies a state of being at ease and completely relaxed with the surrounding space and people. It also implies a transition from a previous more guarded and restricted state. Such a state could be imagined to produce a more energetically receptive subject, for the way in which it involves a relaxing or lowering of barriers, allowing energy to 'flow' more freely and thus participants to become more open to energetic influences. Bonding implies the presence of affective ties which I would argue can become energetic ties between which energy can flow more freely. People often talk of 'breaking the ice' part of this involves softening or breaking peoples social barriers, encouraging people to be more open and relaxed with one another. Both are also assumed to be able to restore subjects to states associated with childhood: freeness, a lack of self-consciousness or inhibitions, and an openness to experiences of joy. Here in this example, this looseness can be seen developing quite literally in the examples: voices starting quiet and growing louder during the group singing on the mini-bus, and movements of the dance become less stiff and more fluid.

To summarise, the music based practices of the volunteer week could be said to contribute to a playful atmosphere, with the potential to energise participants in this atmosphere. This potential to energise is facilitated by a particular relation to the 'atmosphere', namely an alignment of feelings and intentions. The practices here seemed to have the intention of group bonding, a state of looseness, and the joyful experience of the moment, among others.

### **Playful protest of the Climate Swoop**

The Climate Swoop was the mass action of the 2009 Climate Camp. Unlike previous Climate Camps, in which the mass actions had taken place during the camp period, this action took place two months after the camp in a different location. The main camp took place at the end of August to the beginning of September 2009 in London, while the Swoop took place just outside of Nottingham in October. This example was chosen for the way in which it

highlights the multiple micro-atmospheres which can exist in an event. Here a playful atmosphere is able to form on a larger scale and with less fixity spatially or temporally. It does so through the performance of multiple playful practices which have a lingering effect on the space. The playful atmosphere here forms part of the conflict between the playful protestors and the serious police and power-station. Unlike in the previous examples there is not a general aim of alignment between these micro-atmospheres, instead this mis-alignment amplifies the playful energetics of the protestors.

The Camp for Climate Action as an activist group contained both playful and more directly confrontational activists, and this difference of approach is reflected in the practice of their activism. This split was evident at the swoop; while some activists sought to gain access to the power-station others knitted or recited poetry. However this divide in approaches was not oppositional, playful activists cheered on confrontational activist trying to scale the fences and access the power station. Therefore, playful and confrontational atmospheres could align and compliment each other, when they share similar objectives.

However the more playful approach seemed to be adopted by the majority of activists, partly perhaps due to it being a safer option in terms of personal and legal safety. This was also the approach or part of the mass action which I participated in and witnessed up close. The more violent or confrontational protest which took place was generally only evident in the traces it left: bent and drooping fences surrounding by a clutter of activist materials (the remains of banners etc.), text messages announcing that some activist had breached the fence and were scaling the coal piles, a group of activists running at the furthest end of the road, or protestors being dragged away by police officers. It is therefore due to its dominance at the protest overall and within my own experience of the event that the more playful elements are focused on in this narrative.

### **Swooping around the power station**



Figure 31: The looming cooling towers of Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station  
(photograph: authors own)

It was a sunny morning as we arrived at East Midlands Parkway train station, a crowd of activists had started to gather outside the station. We put down our bags in a spare space and sat down with the crowd. The huge cooling towers stood on the other side of the tracks and were so immense they seemed to almost represent the power the activists were fighting and seemed to present their fight as impossible or unwinnable, or at least immense. The activists around me were writing the phone number to call if you were arrested on their arms and several activists were handing out bust cards: a leaflet which explained what do to if you were arrested. These actions added to an atmosphere of anticipation. My companions soon became restless waiting for the march to begin, the march couldn't start until all the protestors had arrived, so they started to amuse themselves by having a cartwheel race across the train station car park. The atmosphere, even before the protest itself had begun, seemed to encourage and accentuate their playful sides and natures. They were also keen to meet and mingle with the other activists, first by sharing out their freegan food and then by initiating a game with surrounding activists. With little gaming equipment to hand my companions decided to improvise, using an empty plastic bottle as the

basis of a game. Surrounding similarly bored activist were recruited and stood in a circle around the bottle, the game was simple: two players had to try and grab the bottle before the other. The fun of the game was more in the edging movements and trying to out-manoeuvre the other player rather than the actual obtaining of the bottle.

During our time waiting outside in the station car park police stood on the other side of the road watching us and waiting for the protest to begin. After some time we were asked to move to a space on the other side of the station entrance because we were blocking up the car park slightly although it appeared to be hardly used: no cars arrived or left while we were there and there were few cars already parked there. The waiting was almost intolerable and it seemed like we would never start (later I learnt that we were waiting so long partly to give the people arriving on bikes a head start: some were cycling all the way from Nottingham Station to the power station). During our time on the other side we spoke to people about other campaigns: one activist told us about a 350 campaign and encouraged us to organise an action. The others helped a guy attach a flag to his bag as he was getting tired of holding it. A coach arrived with some activists during this time waiting on the other side. Shortly after this we were told that the march would start in a few minutes and to get ready.

Once we started marching a protestor with a speaker attached to his bike (the speaker was being powered by his cycling) started cycling along with the crowd playing music on his speaker, this gave the march a party/festival/carnival type feel. The simple act of playing the music and the alternative style of the music (not military style music as a typical 'march', and not pop music that you would normally hear in everyday spaces, it was also mostly unfamiliar music which I had never heard before and feel-good music that made you want to dance, not angry music, and rather slow paced and relaxed just like the protest itself) seemed almost a rebellion in itself to the silence of the police (walking along side us) and the deserted road (the police had had all the roads surrounding the power station closed off to make the protest run more smoothly and safely, and probably they hoped more quickly). We walked along slowly to the music, half walking and half dancing (some more dancing than walking), the music was soon joined by sounds of a samba band playing. People held up colourful banners large and small, I felt slightly left out because I didn't have a banner or a part of

a banner to hold, one of the activists I came with had made a banner but it only required two people to hold it, though my hands were so full of the bags I wouldn't have been able to. As well as dancing people began chanting and everyone joined in once they knew the words. One of the chants was:

“Ratcliffe-on-Soar, rotten to the core, we aint gonna burn your coal no more”

This was chanted in an angry way but not in a genuinely angry way, it felt more like they were play acting their anger, presumably because it couldn't just be summoned at will though many probably did feel genuinely angry at the existence of the power station. This play acting added to the playful and performative nature of the march.

I started off next to my two companions but as we marched I found myself moving around the crowd, left and right, forwards and backwards, almost unconsciously – moving into spaces as they appeared moving aside so others could go further forwards or back. I soon realised that I had lost sight of my companions, even their small banner wasn't visible amongst the sea of much larger banners.

After much marching/dancing we reached the main entrance to the power station, the police started telling and directing us to go into the entrance road which they described as the ‘designated protest space’, but the march had stopped and nobody moved. The police kept repeating themselves and I could hear the anger growing in their voices. This expression in their voice made it feel as if anything could happen as if they might start using force to move us or were going to start arresting people for not doing as they asked. During this people kept looking around, some seemed to not know what was going on (like me) and weren't sure if we were just disobeying them to be stubborn or provoke them, but nobody dared move as nobody else was. Some people seemed to know what was going on and were whispering to each other, but didn't want to let the police know and wanted to leave them in suspense. Eventually the police stopped trying to persuade/tell us to move. A short time later the cyclists arrived opposite us and everyone cheered. After this we all sat down where we were either on the road or on the grass on the side to have a rest and a picnic.



Figure 32: Picnicking on the power station (photograph: authors own)

Shortly after my two companions found me they decided they wanted to look at a sign on the fence and climbed down the grassy verge, stepping over a small fence. Before long a policeman approached them asking them to get away from the fence, they tried to challenge him explaining, almost laughing, that they were only trying to read the sign. But eventually they gave in to his threatening behaviour and came back, though still laughing and smiling to each other at his disproportionate reaction.

This unplanned pantomime was followed by a more planned form of street theatre; a group near where I was sitting performed a mock funeral for EON and coal power, there was a small group of people all dressed in black with flowers and wreaths while some carried in a coffin marked EON and performed a funeral ceremony. A couple of people came forward to recite poems.



Figure 33: A theatrical funeral for EON (photograph: authors own)

There were some speeches during the picnic to the whole group, about why we were here, by various people using the speaker attached to the bike and a microphone. During our picnic some activists got out knitting needles and balls of wool and started knitting to pass the time. I also noticed an activist picking an apple from a tree on the road side, I realised that because of its position, by the motorway the apples from this tree had probably never been picked or eaten before (by a person, it was quite a small young tree), that this simple act wouldn't normally happen. It was picked and eaten in a rather performative way, in almost exaggerated gestures: slowly extending their arm and slowly and forcefully biting into the apple, this was despite the fact that perhaps no one besides me noticed this act.



Figure 34: Having a game of ‘Giants, Wizards, and Pixies’ on the motorway  
(photograph: authors own)

### **Subversive atmospheres**

Humorous activism brings a carnival, yet simultaneously sharp, atmosphere to rallies, creating ‘liminal’ settings that are conducive to conversion and deep learning. Such times are characterized by playfulness, experimentation, diversity, freedom, ambiguity and lessened obedience to authority: ‘the usual roles in social life are momentarily suspended and replaced with an overwhelming – even sacred – sense of collective camaraderie’ (Turner, 1982, p. 20–59). (Branagan, 2007: 6)

Branagan’s observation above of humorous activism, as bringing “a carnival, yet simultaneously *sharp*, atmosphere” (my emphasis), echoes Foucault’s discussion of curiosity bringing “a sharpened sense of reality” (1984: 328). Both, playful activism and curiosity, I would argue embrace a joyful side to life, reminiscent of Arendt’s “joy in action”, which she noted in relation 1960s and 1970s activism (Arendt, 1972: 202). In playful activism the ‘joy’ of activism is being overtly displayed, a joyful energy and exuberance, partly I would argue to encourage its contagion. The playful atmosphere of the Swoop seems to add life and colour to the previously grey and lifeless surroundings of the power

station. The lively theatrical nature of the Swoop seemed to sharpen the space and the feelings experienced. This apparent sharpening is also evident in the previous examples, just as the lightening and loosening, openness and alignment of the previous examples are evident here.

In this example the serious business of everyday life (Thrift, 1997: 145), in the form of police and power-station security, is confronted directly by the playful and joyful disobedience of the protestors. The discussion here will focus on this multiplicity and contrasting of atmospheres; the grey serious mood of the police contrasted with the colourful play of the protestors, as well as the alignments and mis-alignments amongst the activists themselves.

Additionally, echoed above in Branagan's quote is Thrift's definition of play as performative experimentation; Branagan states that such activism and the atmospheres they encourage are characterised by "playfulness, *experimentation*, diversity, freedom, ambiguity and lessened obedience to authority" (my emphasis). While this performative and experimental element is present in each example, these playful acts at the Swoop can be distinguished in a particular way from the playful humour of the transition group, and singing and dancing of the eco-village, specifically as examples of especially performative play. This is not to say that the previous examples were not performative, as they clearly were to an extent, but that was not in these cases the primary function of their play, whereas in the Swoop example I would argue this is. Additionally, I do not mean to argue that the performative nature was solely for outside viewers (e.g. the media, the wider public), this performative nature also served internal and adversarial purposes. Additionally, such playful 'eruptions' (Schechner, 1993) lingered even once passed and completed, such lingerings seemed to combine with new eruptions of play to create the impression of a playful atmosphere.

Just as in the previous two examples, the numerous playful practices of the activists present seemed to contribute to an overall playful feeling or atmosphere. Referring to the above narrative, the first example of such practices were the game playing of my companions, followed later by the games of the group as a whole, such as the wizards, giants and pixie game (Figure 34). The second form of playful practices were the performative practices of the dance-marching to music and the street theatre of the mock funeral. Thirdly, the playfully disobedient acts of the protestors: not doing as police ask, questioning

police, mis-directing the police, climbing fences to display banners. Lastly, but certainly not least, there were more subtly subversive acts which involved using the space in ways which subverted its normal functions: picnicking and knitting in the road, picking apples from the roadside. All of these acts seemed to contribute to my own sense of a playful atmosphere to the protest. Play here then is present in the form of and as a tool for subversion and resistance. These various manifestations of play all subvert or resist in some way, whether subtly or overtly, the authority of the police or the normal use of the space.

One way in which this impression of playful atmosphere seemed to manifest was in the relationship between playful practices and the surrounding space. The playful practices of the protest seemed to combined together to create a particular impression of the space, the impression of the site of the power-station as a playground rather than a serious place of energy production and security. Fences became climbing frames, coal piles climbing mounds, roads dance floors and picnic spots. Even practices which were not directly confronting the power station or the police became subversive simply for the alternative and opposing way the space was being used, opposed to its normal function. The protestor's play was then rebelling against the rules of the space, in addition to those subversive uses outlined above: bridges became parties, the woodlands lining the roads became hideaways, and the fields next to the fences became festivals.

More specifically, the play here was primarily in the form of an 'eruptive' and 'disruptive' (Schechner, 1993) play, erupting from the ground at various moments to disrupt the workings of the power-station, the normal use of this space, and the activities of the police. Play here was also an outlet for the activist's energy and frustration. To suggest a playful atmosphere developed is not to suggest that protestors were there to enjoy themselves, these were serious activists with serious concerns, but they were choosing to funnel this serious concern into something which they considered more constructive than direct confrontation: playful disobedience.

The play here also served the purpose of morale boosting, the protest took part over a long day and it would have been easy to become despondent and depleted without such eruptions. This playfulness countered the discomfort, or rather anxiety and fear encouraged by the police presence and extra protective

barriers. Menacing police and police dogs, extra fences of barbed wire, single protestors being dragged off by several police officers, watching protestors climb the fences only to be arrested on the other-side, such sites were hugely depleting. As night fell the playful air of disobedience was replaced by a menacing sense of dread, police and police dog numbers had swelled and were forming barricades with their bodies, conversely protest numbers had shrunk, and the colour and music of the day's protest had been replaced by darkness and glow in the dark police labels.



Figure 35: The glow-in-the-dark police barricade (photograph: authors own)

This contrast in police and protestor atmospheres is mirrored in the bodies of protestors and police. The protestors seemed more agile than the police or at least used their bodies more easily or willingly. The police's bodies in comparison were old and rigid, the protestors bodies seemed more moveable and flexible, able to: dance, climb and bend fences, and block roads. Like the protestors the police's main weapon was their bodies (and therefore also the energy of their bodies) but in contrast the police used their bodies to stand firm and tall, rather than to run, climb and dance.

But this is not to imply that the playful atmosphere was merely created by bodies, the actions of bodies, and their relation to other bodies. Music, I would argue played a key role in both initiating and continuing eruptions and

disruptions. Much like in the previous example, the music of the dance-march, which started protestors in the direction of the power station, seemed to go through you and surround you, submerge you so that you felt like you were dancing even if you were not. Such atmospheres can therefore include and align subjects in a variety of ways. Branagan suggests that playful activism is more amenable to inclusivity than the opposite; confrontation activism:

Humorous protests using music, theatre, poetry, sculpture, fire-stick twirling or juggling also create events that are celebratory rather than violent or threatening to audiences. A plethora of such actions can create an atmosphere which enthralls and includes audiences, whereas rallies with minimal humour or violent art can be frightening and alienating.

(Branagan, 2007: 7)

Yet the experience of the Swoop narrated above seems to contradict this, the police seemed unaltered by the humour and playful outbursts of the activists, and in addition outsiders or newcomers who do not feel part of the play can at times feel marginalised and 'out of place' (Cresswell, 1996). This mis-alignment can be substantially influenced by the affective angle through which subjects perceive and encounter playful atmospheres. One element of this affective angle is expectations and assumptions, play carries with it certain affective expectations of joy and enjoyment, and this is no less true of playful activism. Therefore in the same way that Ahmed's (2010) discusses 'happy objects', here if play is expected to bring such feelings, and especially when others appear to be experiencing such feelings and yet you are not, there can be as a result a sense of disappointment, misalignment and alienation.

Clearly then, just as Brennan and Ahmed suggests, I entered the space of the Swoop from a particular affective angle and with particular affective expectations. Namely with an apprehension built on activist and media descriptions of the G20 protests earlier that year and previous Climate Camps (e.g. Kingsnorth 2008), namely in relation to the police hostility and brutality with which activists were met.

Therefore, while the term atmosphere often implies a coherent shared feeling, this misses out on contradictory, multiple, and in-between states inherent

in the multiple identities of individual activists. As well as, the multiple, contradictory states and moments which can occur in particular ‘rituals’, practices, or events. All the activists I encountered wore multiple ‘hats’, as one activist put it, while these multiple identities were nearly always complimentary they can still result in in-between and contradictory feelings. My own experiences were clearly influenced by own ‘hats’ of activist, academic, and activist-academic. Similarly ‘groups’ would always contain within them multiple or micro groups and it was possible to feel ‘aligned’ (Ahmed, 2010: 37) to some, while mis-aligned to others. Alignments could also quickly shift as a result of encounters and experiences. To some extent<sup>5</sup> in the previous examples I was a participant in the play enacted, whereas here I was predominantly outside of or a spectator to the play practices, and this clearly influenced my experience here. But while I was often outside of the playful acts themselves, I still felt present within a playful atmosphere. Part of this is due to the contagion of energetic play, but also partly the impression these acts left on the surrounding space.

## **Conclusions**

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, certain practices, presences, and spatial arrangements, are assumed to be able to ‘energise’ subjects and spaces. Here practice of play and the presence of playful atmosphere, can often do this, but it is not that they literally increase a tangible or quantifiable thing called energy, but rather can encourage an openness and alignment to the conditions of and for action, and thus the potential for further action. Play can take on a life of its own, and an energy of its own, which is more-than the sum of its parts (Bennett, 2010) in the form of a playful atmosphere, which can enliven and linger on in its effects. Relations here ultimately come down to our relationship with this atmosphere, whether we are open to its influence, whether we are aligned to its intentions.

And there were clearly different intentions (though not necessarily explicit intentions) within each form of play e.g. breaking an awkward silence, bonding, and subversion, and such intentions could influence energy dynamics

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<sup>5</sup> I never seemed to be able to fully take my ‘researcher’ hat off and therefore always felt slightly outside of things, and this was perhaps unconsciously intentional; my researcher identity providing a safety net or barrier.

even if indirectly or unintentionally. For example, the humour of the Transition meeting formed both a break in the rhythm and seriousness of the meeting, and an opening for the formation of a lighter atmosphere. The singing and dancing of the eco-village volunteer week created an energetic and affective alignment, even if only temporarily, and encouraged a state of looseness. Finally, at the Climate Swoop the playful eruptions renewed the playful atmosphere of the protest while disrupting the power-station and police.

Solidarity and bonding were clearly an intention across and at the heart of each example. Yet isolated practices of play have limited or only temporary effects on group bonding and energy, there is always the potential effect of alienating those not yet bonded or comfortable in the group. Whereas, the repetition of play events or practices, within an already bonded or becoming-bonded group, can have a more lasting effect. Play is intended often to speed up or bypass prolonged periods of bonding, and it is not always possible to speed up this process.

Solidarity and bonding practices are assumed to involve purely human actors and to be a fundamentally human act, especially in the case of the play acts here of humour, music and playful protest. Yet clearly here the more-than-human elements were participants in this bonding and provide the very conditions for bonding: the rising warm air and poorly insulated roof along with the groups coats, scarves and gloves paved the conditions for this humour and ‘shared community of meaning’ (Davidson, 2001). While the darkness, campfire, and instruments contributed to the conditions for the circle dancing. At the Swoop the empty motorway provided space for the game of Giants, Wizards and Pixies. While the apple tree provided the conditions for a subtly subversive act – picking an apple from the side of main road, from a tree rarely seen let alone interacted with by humans because of its position – similarly the empty road (because of the protest) and the time of year provided the conditions for this act. This act of picking the apple is reminiscent of Heidegger’s (1971) bridge, but obviously reversed: the road divides the banks, rather than bringing them together, but in doing so brings them into existence as banks of the road, therefore without this dividing the act of picking the apple would not be subversive.

Both play and atmosphere, and therefore equally playful atmospheres, are both ambiguous and complex phenomenon which easily elude explanation and definite exploration, and this is the key problematic here. Additionally, judging or observing the effects of play is very difficult, and especially difficult to articulate to another, just as Thrift refers to dance as beyond words, whether written or spoken. This is especially problematic given, as Schechner observes, that: “it is possible to be playing but not be in a play mood; to be playful but not playing; to be playing and neither know it nor be in a play mood” (Schechner, 1993: 26), and further that “it is possible for spectators to be in a play mood, while the players themselves are neither in a play mood nor playing” (Schechner, 1993: 26).

Despite these problematics and complexities, three key elements stand out in these examples, which can encourage greater understanding: alignment, openness, and affective angles. This alignment and openness to an atmosphere, combined with the affective angle from which we encounter it, can influence what we experience or do not experience in terms of energies. Clearly my own experiences of each practice, and the perceived atmosphere with which they contributed, was influenced by my affective angle (Ahmed, 2010): my assumptions, associations, memories, expectations, and the mood with which I arrived. But, in line with Ahmed’s arguments on the matter, this is not to say that when a subject arrives anxious or unplayful they will always remain closed to play, as there were clearly moments when my affective angle was subverted or overturned.

An underlying relation, mentioned in the introduction, and particularly prevalent in the latter two examples, is that of a personal and broader cultural relationship with play itself. There were clearly assumptions and frameworks ingrained in my own thinking around play which influenced the angle from which I approached the playful practices and moments, which the second quote from Jordan in the introduction highlights. Play was already assigned and labelled as childish, and unserious and therefore opposed to purposeful and meaningful practical activism, or at most a diversion and break from activism in order to recharge. Yet in each case the play was part and parcel of the activism itself, of creating a different and alternative way of being. Here play always had a purpose and intention, and even when this intention was not achieved the play

did not become purposeless, but rather it served as an experiment from which to learn, and formed part of on-going experiment of being together and acting together.

**Chapter 8**  
**Conclusions:**  
**Conditions for Activism**

From chanting and waiting for activism to start, to sitting in uncomfortable and humourous circles, to imaging the future and constructing a future home, to swooping around London and power stations, to shivering on stalls and in tents, to talking and being talked to by other activists, I have sought to try to understand some of the conditions for activism. Or at least inspire an interest<sup>1</sup> in the exploring these conditions, which are after all the very energies and lifeblood of activism. Many activists, or at least those that I encountered, already make it part of their activist work (both implicitly and explicitly) to better understand and nurture these conditions whether through the active listening and comforting containment of the Wellbeing space, or through the food, humour and meeting structure of the Transition group, or the volunteer opportunities of the Lammas eco-village. Of course there is often little discussion between movements, and sometimes even within movements, of these strategies and experiments in managing and encouraging the conditions for activism and therefore much more is needed. What I have found in my many blunders, awkward moments, disappointments, and frustrations, is that it is not about finding the universal conditions for activism. Especially as one person's hell is of course another's heaven, as the Mainshill<sup>2</sup> group so eloquently demonstrated to me when I asked them how they sustained their energy at the camp against such adversity including the extreme weather conditions:

it's great to be outdoors and feel like you're working - especially during the summer when you could be working until 10:30pm and not notice how late it was. Most of us would take living outside and building things with our hands over living in a town or city

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<sup>1</sup> or at the very least continue my own interest, 'interest' here is drawn from McCormack's 'an interest in rhythm' (2002).

<sup>2</sup> Mainshill, or rather Mainshill Solidarity Camp, was a protest camp I visited in Scotland (the site of the Scottish Climate Camp in 2009) where activists were defending a woodland against destruction from opencast mining by: camping in the woods and in the trees (in tree-houses) and building defences out of re-used/re-claimed materials, as well as using their bodies to disable and obstruct machinery.

and sitting in front of computers all day. I think living somewhere like Mainshill Wood, especially when you're trying to defend it, gives you a definite sense of place, where you become attached to the land. Just experiencing the changing seasons over the past 6 months, the colours, the change in wildlife abundance, makes you really appreciate what it is that we're trying to protect. (Appendix D)

This turned my thinking on its head, I realised that I had assumed what I had found de-energising or discouraging of action (of a particular form) were universally de-energising. It is then not about finding the universal conditions for activism which can then be easily reproduced but rather about *the process*, the trial and error (or “fail again, fail better” (Dewsbury, 2010)), of trying to engage with and unearth these conditions, which is important. And of course “this process is experimental, messy and heavily context-dependent”<sup>3</sup> (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 476) which is why there are no one size fits all strategies of aligning, aligning with, and opening up to these conditions. It is the attempt to form such alignments and to open up to such conditions which is important, and nurturing these very processes of opening and aligning. But exploring and reporting on these experiments, both within activism and activist-academia, can help towards the activist project and help to collectively ease the activist burden, as there can of course be similarities of context and therefore similarities of strategies and conditions which can be reproduced. For example, similarity of context occurred across these three case studies, in particular: the circular meeting arrangement, participatory processes of spatial arrangement, overt future producing practices, and practices of play.

This research has of course been primarily about processes, both in terms of understanding the act of activism itself as a process (as opposed to an endpoint or outcome) and in turn part of and tangled up in processes, including the opening up and aligned to the conditions for action. This builds on Summers-Effler's (2010: x) observation that activist groups do not “*have* processes”, they *are* processes. As academics our assumptions around the nature of the practice of activism are often somewhat outmoded, and I was equally guilty of this, as the

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<sup>3</sup> Here Chatterton and Pickerill are referring to everyday activist practices more broadly but this observation applies here also and mirrors my own fieldwork experiences.

above Mainshill extract demonstrates. This research therefore has been a two way process and I was constantly confronted with my own assumptions about activism, energy, and action. Such assumptions were at times difficult to get around and break out of. An overall assumption I was guilty of was of assuming the new researcher (i.e. myself) to be a theoretical blank slate unshackled by theoretical and cultural blinkers. But such assumptions are of course deeply ingrained beyond ourselves and not limited to the academic life-world. In particular these assumptions related to ‘energy’ and the production of action. While Summers-Effler realised she was conceiving of activist groups as things, I realised that I was guilty of conceiving of the energy of activism as a ‘thing’: a tangible, quantifiable force. This assumption was largely based on ingrained everyday understandings as demonstrated by Brown (1999) and Caygill (2007) in the *Energies of Activism* chapter (Chapter 3). This research then is as much inspired and developed by the activism fieldwork experiences as by the literature on activism, affects, and the more-than-human.

In addition to attempting to feed back into the field, that is the activist project itself, by highlighting some of the conditions for action I encountered and some of the strategies being experimented with by activists to nurture them, this research also of course seeks to feed back into the activism literature. This has involved critically reviewing the geographical activist literature, in addition to the emerging and expanding literature on the emotions and affects of activism. In turn I have incorporated particular energetic readings into a re-reading of the agency of activism: the affect literature in which affect is considered an increase/decrease in a body’s capacity or potential for action (rather than affect or emotion as straightforward precursors or catalysts for action) and thus an openness (or closed relation) to action and being acted upon, non-representational theory where action is a doing and process rather than a fixed outcome, and more-than-human literature in which “an actant never really acts alone” (Bennett, 2010: 21).

In particular, through the theoretical explorations outlined above and my empirical explorations of activism in the field, I have sought to contribute to the activist literature in four ways by rethinking the agency of activism (in three ways) and rethinking energy, and these contributions are echoed in the aims and

overall objective of this thesis as set out in the introductory and methodological chapters:

The overall objective of this research is to contribute to the furthering of understanding of activism by rethinking the agency of activism, to address this objective, this research has three aims:

- 1) To develop understanding of *what counts as an act* in activism by exploring a variety of different forms of climate change activism through a more-than-representational lens.
- 2) To expand understanding of *who counts as an actor* in activism by exploring the role of the more-than-human in activism spaces and practices.
- 3) To contribute to understanding of *how the act of activism is produced* by exploring the relation between emotions and affects and the act of activism and developing a particular conception of ‘energy’.

As Thrift’s (1996: 2) definition of agency in the thesis introduction demonstrated, agency is three fold, consisting of: what counts as actions, who count as actors, and how action is produced. In order, therefore, to rethink the agency of activism, we must rethink all three elements. Firstly then, rethinking *what* the act of activism is, from an overt confrontational or oppositional (usually ‘direct’) intentional act, to a more-than-political, more-than-representational, and more-than-human act. Secondly, and related to this first element, rethinking *who* enacts an act of activism, from a intentional human actor who self identifies as an ‘activist’ (and is ‘worthy’ (Pickerill, 2008a) of this title), to an arrangement of multiple actors or ‘participants’ (Latour, 2005) where things all play their part, though not always intentionally or as expected, and things do things *as well*. Thirdly, and of course related to both these elements, is rethinking *where* (Horton and Kraftl, 2009) the act of activism comes from or how it is produced. Therefore the fourth contribution which this research seeks to make, and the overarching aim of this thesis, is to offer the concept of energy, used here to refer

to the conditions for action, as a way through which to rethink the agency and energies of activism. I will outline these contributions in more depth, and identify how I meet these research aims, in the sections below entitled Rethinking Agency, followed by Rethinking Energy.

### **Rethinking Agency**

The theoretical and empirical material of this thesis has together sought to address the research aims I set out in the beginning of the thesis. The first of my three aims was to develop understanding of what counts as an act in activism. Typically, as outlined above the act of activism is considered an overt and intentional act of ‘direct’ resistance or opposition. To facilitate this rethinking of the act of activism, and counter the dominance of ‘direct’ action, I chose to explore a variety of forms of climate change activism. Alongside the activism of the ‘direct’ action group CCA I explored activism as a more mundane and regular part of everyday life through the activities of the Transition group, and activism as a lifestyle in itself through the Lammas eco-village. Yet what I found was that a variety of acts occurred within each case study, and that perhaps quite obviously, activism even in its most dramatic and intentional form is composed of numerous subtler acts less easily labelled as activism. Furthermore, such subtle acts are just as capable of contributing to the activist project and the conditions for action. Examples from the fieldwork of such acts include: the smudgings of the climate camp site plan, the re-imaging and drawing of the future in the Transition group, the liming and lathing acts of the eco-village, and the picking of an apple at the Swoop. This realisation, of the potential of subtle acts, will seem quite obvious to some activists, especially some of those involved in this research, but it was not obvious to me and may not be obvious to many other activists and activist-academics.

The first aim also sought to reveal the more-than-representational nature of activism by exploring activism through this theoretical lens, and thus to argue for a conception of the act of activism as a process rather than an endpoint or outcome. As stated in the methodological chapter while “the world does not

resolve or come to rest”<sup>4</sup> often it is assumed that activism does, that is, that it can be accurately represented, and there is often extra pressure on activism researchers to ‘accurately’ represent the groups and causes they research. Activists, just as activist academics, struggle to represent their causes and experiences, and go through their own representational struggles. We saw these struggles quite literally in the attempts of the Transition group to translate their visions into drawings in the group’s visioning workshop. The practice of activism is of course, like any other practice or doing, more-than-representational, it is not reducible to a newspaper article, a photograph, a thesis etc. Yet activism research is rarely brought into conversation with non-representational theory, as though to do so would be to make futile activism research, but this need not be the case instead I would argue that it can foster a richer and deeper exploration of activism. It was in the very doing of activism, talking about the doing of activism with activists, and my very struggles to convey the activism I encountered, which reinforce this more-than-representational nature of activism.

The second aim of this research was to expand understanding of who counts as an actor in activism, especially in relation to the more-than-human which is largely marginalised in activism research. While agency has been expanded more broadly to include the more-than-human, activism is still largely conceived as a solely human act, in which only the human activists acts and all other elements are passive (often including ‘space’). This privileging is of course for multiple reasons, not least political such as the fear of undermining the already frequently undermined plight of activism, alongside the ‘romance of resistance’ (Sparke, 2008). Many activists may well be hostile to the idea of expanding activism agency to include the more-than-human, but this aim is as much about humanising the activists (placing activists on pedestals can be counterproductive to activists themselves in placing too much pressure and expectation on them) and is not about placing more-than-human as superior actors, rather it is about arguing that things do things *as well*. Becoming aware of the role of more-than-human can and does contribute to the activist project. Examples from the research in which the more-than-human contributed to the

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<sup>4</sup> (Beckett 1987: 19, quoted in Dewsbury et al, 2002: 437)

activist project included the chalk site plan in the participatory arrangement of the climate camp, the building materials of the eco-village which alongside creating the eco-village itself could create new futures for volunteers, and the food of the Transition group helping to sustain the energy of meetings. In the empirical chapters I sought to illuminate the more-than-human through my narratives, based in turn on my observant participation notes, and my photographs. But the more-than-human equally emerged in interviews, such as the random objects of the climate camp drama workshop. Additionally, often activists saw the activist ideas themselves as the key agents, such as the ‘founder’ of the eco-village who described the project as an ideas which they found themselves in “a position to run with”, rather than a project which they straightforwardly produced or pioneered.

Expanding the actor of activism to include the more-than-human, was here not just about things and objects, but equally about including processes and not-quite tangible and more-than material presences as actors in the act of activism. Here processes included the specific process of the field sites, such as the: arranging and re-arranging of space at the climate camp and Transition office, and the re-imagining of the future, but also broader processes of agency: openness and alignment. Here such not-quite tangible presences included affective baggage (including memories and expectations), the imagined future including the vague and blurred imagined futures which are not quite actualised in imagination, and lightening, loosening, and eruptive atmospheres.

Overall in these three aspects (the act, actor, and production of activism) what is being rethought is causality, both in terms of what causes acts (and therefore in turn what is being caused and by who) and in terms of what such acts can cause, or what effect or impact they can have. This is ultimately about breaking out of our ‘habits’ of thinking (Bennett, 2010) about activism, and in particular about what acts of activism are and when they count as activism. This is a thinking already begun in resistance critique (e.g. Pile, 1997) and explorations of more everyday activism (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010) but one which while expanding the spectrum of activism still presents it as a spectrum with smaller subtler acts of activism at the lower end assuming such acts can produce little effect. So while other acts are allowed in and allowed to be included in the overall activist picture the ‘direct’ act is still foregrounded and

privileged. Not only does such privileging only offers us a partial view of activism, it overlooks the way in which each type of act contributes equally towards activist energies, that is to the overall conditions and potential for action, and can be just as productive of change because effects do not simply operate by scale.

I was constantly confronted with such scales and hierarchies, they cropped up not only in the hierarchies of the act and actors of activism, but additionally in acts of climate change activism, and scales of energy from high to low, depleted or enhanced. Taking notice of these scalar assumptions is important because they can feedback on themselves; the way we conceive of agency can influence the conditions which emerge and how we relate to them. For example, think of how many everyday acts of climate change activism are discouraged by these scalar assumptions, as Rose's (2012) research is suggestive of, and therefore huge amounts of potential are left locked up: "Soon we shall find that an energy is locked up in everyday life which can move mountains and abolish distances." (Vaneigem, 2006[1967]: 63). This quote is especially fitting here as it invites us to rethink such scalar assumptions around causality because of the unexpected and unpredictable outcomes which all acts can have even seemingly small and subtle acts.

Arguably the very nature of activism is in the trying, the doing of activism, rather than what is achieved and whether the aims are achieved. And it is the continuation of this trying that is ultimately more important than the outcomes. Especially as outcomes can often be belated, or only realised in retrospect (Ahmed, 1953), or unexpected and unintended: and not necessarily worse but rather simply 'different' (Latour, 2005). And if we consider activism in terms of Foucault's power and resistance (1982, 1990) then as soon as activists' goals are achieved they become part of the status quo and established order and are therefore no longer activist in nature, and in turn can change once part of that order in a way quite unintended and unexpected. Something of which climate change, and in particular the 'mainstreaming' and normalising of climate change is a particular example (Rose, 2012; Swyngedouw, 2010). There is something then quite different in the trying of activism, something more fundamental to what activism is, and something which perhaps should be

embraced over the immediate achievements and failures which currently take precedence.

As outlined at the start of this final chapter, the point of rethinking the agency of activism is not merely theoretical but potentially benefits the practices of activism also. When agency is opened up to include the more-than-human elements the overall disposition, and the conditions present (or absent), can be taken into account and worked *with* in order to pursue the activist project. Rather than trying to ignore or override such dispositions, much as Jullien's (1995) ancient Chinese general considers: the lay of the land, the weather conditions, and the mood of his troops, among other conditions, when strategising for battle. In using Jullien's analogy I do not wish to fall into the repeated trap of seeing activism as a confrontational act, as here I imagine the enemy to be inaction and the discouragement of action in a particular context rather than a particular 'evil' or 'enemy'. This is not to say that activism never does this: that it never takes the dispositions of things into account and works with them, either consciously or unconsciously. This is often what activists are doing when they use strategies for nurturing and encouraging the conditions for action. But rather that much can be gained by noticing and reporting such strategies within: activist groups, movements, and across movements (where movements are not conflicting in their aims) more often, more explicitly, and in more detail.

### **Rethinking Energy**

Through the third research aim I sought to contribute to understanding of how the act of activism is produced by exploring the relation between emotions and affects and the act of activism, a relationship which is typically considered as a straightforward cause and effect relation (where affect/emotion is the cause and action the effect). If the act of activism is a more-than-human act and can therefore not be reduced to individual or collective human 'energies', and more-than-political and can therefore not be reduced to political beliefs or political emotions and affects as drivers, then what can we pinpoint as the cause of activism? The point is that we cannot, because the so called 'causes' are always multiple and always excess, nor should we feel the need to, but additionally there is no field of energy beyond the act of activism from which it comes from, it is

always already within it. The act of activism is part of the very conditions for action rather than separate from it. We are constantly encountering and tripping over and immersed in the conditions and thus the potential for action, though we may not always be aware, open to their influence or aligned to them. In the fieldwork experiences I sought to explore the relation between emotions and affects and the act or activism, in particular by exploring and detailing my own affective and emotional experiences in the field. Here emotions and affects were always tangled up in the process of activism, and were always one of many conditions present, additionally such feelings always signalled particular relations to the acts and spaces at hand.

As I have tried to demonstrate with my theoretical chapters, the assumptions present in the literature on the emotions and affects of activism are part of broader assumptions in relation to 'energy' and the production of action. Along with particular assumptions around agency, there are particular assumptions around energy which should be confronted in order for it become a useful term, this involves then to an extent rethinking energy. Some of these assumptions relate to the issues outlined above in the Rethinking Agency section. Just as the outcome or effects of acts are assumed to operate in scales, such as mass direct actions having a greater potential for effect, these scales are assumed to correlate with energy. Larger or more noticeable acts are assumed to require more energy and this greater input is assumed to partly cause the greater and more significant output or increase the chances of a greater outcome. Therefore here, by drawing out particular moments as opposed to imagining or portraying these events and spaces as coherent wholes I have sought to highlight the potential of subtle acts and subtle actors in activist potential.

Another assumption is that the presence of energy always correlates to action and actualised, that the presence of energy automatically translate or transforms into action. The presence of energy, that is the conditions for action and in turn an openness to such conditions, does not guarantee that action will occur, it simply makes action a possibility. We cannot force action to occur, and when we do this is most likely not the sort of action we want. We want action that comes willingly. This does not make the potential for action or fostering this potential any less important.

If energy is used to refer to the conditions for action, rather than a singular quantifiable human force, then it allows for a de-centring of the human actor and a rethinking of activist ‘failures’ and subtle acts of activism. In my attempts to rethink energy, I have drawn out three aspects of these conditions: space, action, and relations, which I believe to be particularly important elements of the conditions for action. Here space emerged neither as a stage upon which subjects perform nor as a fixed coherent whole, instead space here is temporary arrangements of elements of which subjects are themselves a part of, always in flux and in process, open to re-arrangement and re-negotiation. Similarly, action here is a process, a doing, rather than an endpoint and outcome, action here is open ended and can involve not-quite realised and not-quite actualised acts, acts with unexpected and unintended effects. Relations here are about more-than-human relations, and more-than object to human relations, relations here can be to less tangible aspects: to a macro and micro-atmosphere, or to an imagined and potential future. Across all three elements the processes of alignment and opening (or closing off) interweaved.

Openness emerged as an important factor in the conditions for action, partly through my own frequent state of being closed off to or not fully open to the practices and sites of my research. Through this personal failing and obstacle I was able to see how central openness was to the conditions for action, that subjects and elements needed to be open to each other, to the processes, to aligning together. For example, in the case of the setting up camp at the Climate Camp if I had been more opened to the participatory and anti-hierarchical nature of this process I would have been more empowered to ignore the plan and decide ourselves where we wanted our north-east neighbourhood to be, and/or alter the plan ourselves either before or after we set up our tents, or actively sought out other campers from the north to join forces with. And there are conditions which encourage openness and can help this process, equally there are conditions which are often assumed to encourage openness or a relaxing of barriers which can have the opposite effect but this often relates to unpredictable elements such as the affective angle and baggage of the subjects concerned, and their previous experience and knowledge of the practices and situation at hand (or lack of experience/knowledge as was the case in the above site plan example).

Relations emerged as the most important element of energy, where openness is ultimately one particular form of relation. In the examples of the Spaces of Activism (Chapter 5) energy ultimately emerged as the relation between the various elements which formed spatial arrangements and dispositions for particular forms of action (or inaction). In the examples of the Doing of Activism (Chapter 6) energy emerged through relations to the future, namely an imagined and potential future. Finally in Activist Relations (Chapter 7) energy emerged as the relation to a collective mood (though this is not to say uniform or experienced in the same way), that is, to an atmosphere (and an atmosphere here can ultimately be considered a collection of complimentary or conflicting micro-atmospheres). In the next and final section I will consider some of the flaws or problematics of this research and the ways forward they, and the research overall, suggests.

### **Flaws and Futures**

Firstly, and related to the last part of the above section is the affective angle or baggage of the researcher, where research becomes largely autobiographical this affective baggage can become more pronounced. At times I let my affective baggage weigh me down and overshadow broader concerns, but at times my affective angle revealed things. The desire to practice and portray a genuine and honest experience can to an extent excuse a lack of self challenge, I would therefore often allow myself to be grumpy, or cowardly, or shy because I told myself that this was a 'truer' story. The method for choosing examples here, that is the particular moments which were drawn out, were chosen rather intuitively in that like the Carnival of Climate Chaos it was the moments which stood out most in my memory of my experiences and these invariable ended up being particular negative or positive experiences and so therefore to some degree moments in between, of subtler feelings and energies were missed out. This is therefore one area where future energy research could explore and expand. In turn this was partly influenced by my initial presumed assumptions about energy, namely of energy being particular extreme states of enhancement or highs and depletions or lows.

Secondly, although I have tried to counter hierarchies of action and demonstrate the importance of subtler acts of activism, there is another hierarchy which was to some extent overlooked, and this relates to the fact that I inadvertently chose quite high profile groups (or movements) and projects. This then contributes, to an extent, to another hierarchy within activism in which not only particular acts but additionally particular groups, projects, and events often receive greater attention while other less high profile examples are further overlooked. This is part of a broader methodological issue, especially in the case of some activism research where a researcher may not be fully (or at all) an insider, as we often chose our field sites before entering or knowing much about the field.

Thirdly, my partial use of rather conventional methods, namely semi-structured interviews, to explore a less than conventional concern did pose particular challenges. One of the difficulties being in trying to put into words in interviews what exactly it was I wanted to talk about and therefore falling back into and reproducing typical energetic assumptions. Though luckily for me my interviewees would always go beyond my simplistic and vague questions. The flaws within my own interviews for example were partly my questions, and the assumptions they contained, but more importantly my presentation of the interviews. Transcripts and transcribing seemed to suck all the life and energy out of the interviews. While I found this lifelessness could be circumvented slightly by listening back to the interviews rather than simply re-reading transcripts, in presenting to the reader there are greater challenges, and presentation is a vital part of the research process. This was partly why in the end I used few interview extracts in the actual body of my work.

But of course it is difficult to portray all of the complexities and richness of interviews while preserving the anonymous nature of the interviewee. Stories are one possible way round this, in particular using Krupar (2007) and Sparkes (2007) style techniques of using part-fictional accounts and voices inspired by real events and experiences, and experimental writing styles. We should of course experiment more with our writing and presentation style as much as we do with our theory and practice. Interviews in the case of this research in particular were stories, often (shortened) stories of activist life courses. I naturally often sought to start at the beginning, of where activist involvement

began or interviewees often found this the most appropriate place from which to start to explain their present, and so naturally activist stories of all kinds emerged. Additionally, there are angles of research energies which can potentially be explored here, interviews here often re-invigorated or re-energised the research and formed its very lifeblood even though actual extracts may have seemed thin on the ground. This was partly because it always felt less problematic (both ethically and theoretically) to attempt to tell my story rather than theirs.

Although there was an intention to trial more alternative methods there were obstacles in the field (e.g. filming activism), as within activism research the importance of preserving the anonymous status of participants is particular important. Additionally alternative methods often require a greater relationship of trust between researcher and researched and the timescales of my research generally did not allow for this, for example attending short-term activist events without making contact with activists attending prior to the event, or in the case of the Swoop only just before. Equally another difficulty was that of trying to describe my fieldwork experiences especially without exposing too much of myself and making them too inward looking. Therefore future energy research could gain much greater dimensions and depth, unimagined in this research, by using new and experimental methods, as well as or instead of simply talking and writing, to find ways of incorporating more of the research participant's voices. However there is always the danger of doing experimental methods merely for the sake of it.

Finally, part of the reason I encountered the term energy so often in my research was its spiritual use and implications, and here in this research the spiritual use of energy has been slightly overlooked and sidelined. There were of course time and space constraints, and feeling overwhelmed with material already (and underwhelmed at various points much like Law's (2004) 'dazzle' and 'silence' states of research). However, this may have also been an unconscious choice because I felt it would hinder the taking seriously of energy and this of course assumes that the spiritual is not a serious matter when it clearly is being a central part of many people's lives including activists. Indeed a large portion of the activists I encountered were spiritually inclined to some degree whether Buddhist, Quaker, Pagan, New Age spiritualism, or a more general

ecological form of spiritualism, or with hints of one or combinations of several. For example one activist I encountered who I assumed to be not at all spiritually inclined surprised me with the following:

I do believe in the spirit, I do believe, I don't, I'm not Christian, I don't do the god thing but I do believe there's an energy behind, behind us you know, I've got some pagan influences in me so I do see it more in a kind of folk myth legend way of gods and goddesses and energies and spirits and stuff in there. And, yeah, that, um, yeah that does guide me to some degree. I don't, maybe less so these days, but yeah every now and then I do ask for help on that, or I will sit and mediate on a particular problem and I'll ask for guidance on it, you know. And that for me is, is, you know, is a way of communicating with that spirit really, and that does give me an *enormous* amount of energy, and...it's a, yeah, I feel like I'm directly tapping into, into the Earth really at times

(Appendix J)

There is perhaps another thesis in this: an exploration of the spiritual energies of activism within the more-than-political geographies of activism. Although, by focusing in particular on spiritual energies there is the risk of reproducing the human centred activism which I have sought to move away from.

In sum, by drawing out particular moments I have therefore sought to offer an alternative messy and excessive method for exploring activism. This rethinking of activist agency of course opens up the field of what counts as activism further than everyday activist geographies have already (e.g. Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010), which in turn opens up further difficulties in terms of attempting to convey these spaces and practices of activism. But this of course should always be the aim of activist research: to broaden our horizons and welcome their challenging nature. Activism itself often involves a broadening or expanding feeling of potentiality as Klein writes in relation to her activist experiences:

what are reported as menacing confrontations are often joyous events, as much experiments in alternative ways of organising societies as criticisms of existing models. The first time I participated in one of these counter-summits I had the distinct feeling that some sort of political portal was opening up – a gateway, a window, “a crack in history” to use Subcomandante Marcos’s beautiful phrase. This opening had little to do with the broken window at the local McDonald’s, the image so favoured by television cameras; it was something else: a sense of possibility, a blast of fresh air, oxygen rushing to the brain. (Klein, 2002: xxv)

Energy, in the conception proposed here, could be one such new portal in activist research, and in turn a way to re-energise activism research.

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## **Appendices**

### **Recorded Interview Transcripts**

**Interview one**

J: [inaudible]

CL: Mm?

J: [inaudible]

CL: what?

J: [inaudible]

CL: Oh yeah, it's just a little recording thing.

J: Are they expensive?

CL: It's not that expensive. It's not a very good one.

J: How much are they?

CL: It's about 40 pounds.

J: Presumably they've got loads of memory.

CL: Not that much memory, it's not like one of those ones you can transfer to a computer, you have to kind of listen back to it. Ok. So, do you want to give yourself a name for this?

J: J is fine.

CL: Ok, sorry, just trying to understand my handwriting. I was just wondering when you do your activism, you don't have to talk about particular places or

## Appendix A

anything, but are there sort, are there certain places you've been or people you've been with where you feel sort of more energised when you've been doing your activism, do you feel your kind of...When I talk about energy it could be physical or emotional kind of, you know do you feel its important to you?

J: Yeah, I think it's usually where there's most people, I think.

CL: Yeah.

J: In large numbers, it's quite energising, it's it.

CL: Yeah. Do you feel it's quite important like how your energies feeling kind of in relation to your activism?

J: Um, yeah I'd guess so yeah.

CL: Have you ever felt like kind of high or low kind of in terms of your energy you know during your activism?

J: Ummm, yeah but only in like obvious ways like when something's successful it gives you a buzz doesn't it, and then when you fail usually that's depressing but um, but also there's been a lot of depression in the last year um that wasn't particularly, that's not, obviously that makes more angry than, more angry than de-energised in terms of that's quite energising as well. The times that you can get fed up are when people are failing because of avoidable mistakes, um yeah.

CL: Yeah, as well as kind of you know a better future like environmentally and do you kind of think of a future as better emotionally as well kind of a happier future where kind of people are more happy with the state of the world?

## Appendix A

J: Yeah, very much so, yeah um...because the climate camp has always um worked and promoted a kind of egalitarian future and its obviously, we know perfectly that that's the clearly stated aim that everyone's intention is to be, to do that so that's quite an important for promoting justice as well as preventing climate change, so...

[talking to other people in the tent]

J: sorry

CL: It's alright. One of the things I'm interested in knowing is kind of happiness during activism, like do you ever experience real highs or kind of joys during activism?

J: Um, I felt really happy that um felt really happy that people were really about that made me really happy just made me happy that everyone really pulled together, um...again you know I was unhappy if there was disunity or if there was faintheartedness or the courage that people displayed that can exhaust at various times so... even though the outcome was quite mixed in that people got injured and people got arrested um and they did really really well in the circumstances I think so that made me very happy to be assertive against police oppression, so I, come with the same thing don't I [laughs], so um yeah.

CL: Ok, um have you ever experienced burnout while being an activist.

J: Um, not total burnout I don't think, I've experience getting very tired um but I mean my perception of total burnout is an unwillingness basically to go on, having to give up because you've been over tasked, um being, certainly experience symptoms of stress like short temper and things like that um but that would be staying in the foothills of burnout I think, so...

J: I've got a long career of burnout ahead of me [smiles/laughs]

## Appendix A

CL: Do you find like certain emotions during your activism kind of boost you, you were talking about anger kind of boosting you up?

J: I wouldn't really say, I probably did use the word anger before but I would really try and avoid anger maybe indignation would be a better word [interruption some discussion of anger and outrage in background] because anger is like a lack of control that we don't really want to have, but indignation yeah...

[Interruption: "justifiably outraged"]

J: Do you need this to be like really one on one or...

CL: No no, it doesn't matter. Um

J: I don't know how your research is sort of planned but...

CL: I was just wondering how you sort of sustain your energy, your like physical and emotional energy for activism, you know things you do that kind of keep you going

J: Um.

CL: You know, could be anything.

J: Um, I don't think, I don't think of it as something in a way that um needs, it's what I want to do so um Have I understood the question correctly?

CL: Have there ever been times during activism when the things people are feeling, the energy of the group as seemed to kind of transfer between you know everyone in the group so that your all kind of synchronised

## Appendix A

J: Um, I guess, do you want to repeat the question just so I can have a think about it.

CL: Yeah, it's sort of you know when kind of feelings or kind of you know energetic feelings kind of almost contagious, everyone seems to kind of...

J: Well I mean, I can't exactly, it's a bit of a sort of psychological old hat but I think the incitements of police repression against my generation made tremendous solidarity, so its one of the most obvious things to say but I think that probably is also the most striking example

CL: It almost helps in a way

J: Yeah I mean if you were anti-police then what Kent police did at Kingsnorth would have really made you happy because it essential drove, people who might have been undecided about the police it drove them into the arms of the radicals. There's always a bit of a debate between liberals and radicals, liberals tend to except the state and maybe want to reform it and so on and so on, where as radicals sort of totally reject it and um the police action at Kingsnorth really drove people towards the radical pole so which presumably they don't want to do so, I mean overall the might want to use a provocation from time to time um and they'll make people angry so they fall into a trap but in general I don't think the police want to delegitimize the state presumably [laughs]

CL: yeah [laughs]

J: so

CL: Did it feel like a war kind of?

J: Well, obviously it's a conflict isn't it so um people, people use a lot of metaphors that are from war like battles and struggles, so.

## Appendix A

CL: Did it feel kind of like they were more your enemies than before, like after that?

J: Um, well it, it was the most, um I think it was the most escalated situation, it was the most escalated episode, I didn't go to the G20 in London but in terms of conflicted situations there's a continuum isn't there kind of argument through non-violence direct action through to then actual combat, so there's a spectrum isn't there, what happened at Kingsnorth was moved up the spectrum, I mean people were, well they weren't trading blows actually because it was all coming from the police but there was obviously it was an actual violent situation where physical violence was being meted out and being met with um I wouldn't say violence from our side but a forceful response, you know using our bodies to push back and so on and so on, so it certainly climbed up the kind of ladder of escalation towards warfare from an argument err but um, then obviously the vocabulary that people use to talk about it can start to be quite tactical vocabulary, out blanking, you know penetrating um enveloping all that stuff because those things become practical. Actually there's one example where from what happened to us in Kilo Five which is the gate where the police attacked us, were you at Kingsnorth?

CL: No I wasn't there.

J: Oh ok. So um, I always say to people that um there's nothing more convenient than an offensive operation against an enemy who stays where he is, which is what the police did to us, basically sat there like lemons and the police kind of did their manoeuvre without us really hindering them so you know there's nothing more convenient who stays where they is, where they are and that's a quote from Marshall [inaudible] so you can see how military stuff is quite apt. Police public order manual probably talks in those terms as well, so I think it says military sounding terminology starts to become appropriate in a public order situation and of course that's true because you're seeing a political conflict. I

## Appendix A

mean even in out right war there's, I don't think there's, in outright war there's still some things, there are still some cooperation between both sides but there's usually, there's often like an agreement not to use certain tactics err gas or whatever so on that continuum kind of the distance from the start of war to anything goes is quite a long continuum.

CL: It must have been quite scary, was it?

J: Was it scary, um not that scary because um if I think about reasons: the sense of solidarity, so although, also, you have to remember that are more, or most people aren't scared of physical injury their scared of social stigma as well, um so...so you know I'd be really scared of people calling, of people thinking I was a liar or something like that than, you know physical injury scary, and being thought well of by your peers because you were you know doing your part in the defence of the camp is something that is desirable as well, so it's not just a, it's not a totally negative situation if you see what I mean. And the kind of support and admiration of your peers is if you see what I mean that's like also like soldiers, isn't it. I do approach the psychology of, my understanding of these things is kind of condition by my background because I've been in the army so and I left the army and I studied a lot, I did my PhD on Military History so I do tend to think in to think in these terms more than most, so but I'm also advancing arguments as to why I think this is the case, there are analogies.

CL: Have you been at all the Climate Camps?

J: Not all of them... I wasn't at the G20 in the city which again since were talking about a repression, of course Kingsnorth was very oppressive but the G20 was very oppressive as well.

CL: The kind of actions that you've done that have felt most successful have they been at times when you've felt kind of optimistic I suppose or positive about

## Appendix A

what was going to happen, or was it more that was just a result of it you know, it didn't play a role.

J: Um, I like the things that are well organised even you know sort of regardless of the immediate outcome because I think every action is, as well as being an end in itself it's also training for the next action. So if you think an actions well organised even if it by chance fails then everyone learns valuable lessons. To see this the Romans hated or they preferred to loose a battle when they'd done the right thing than to win by chance, because they thought if you were badly organised but won by then it taught you bad lessons, it taught you to be lazy in future. So tend to not see actions in isolation but as part of a continuum of development of skills.

CL: Just kind of being involved in activism has it kind of contributed to your happiness in any way you know because you feel like your doing something about the things you feel strongly about.

J: Yeah totally yeah, yeah, I'd feel totally awful if I didn't do anything [interruption]. So um, I think that links to the other question about how do I find my energy for, you know when you said how do you find energy to do activism it's like well I don't really need any because it's what I want to do.

CL: It's there already.

J: Yeah, I suppose you'd say like I find energy to do it because I feel kind of guilty or had a bad conscious if I didn't do it.

CL: So it's kind of powered by your kind of morals and ethics.

J: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so yeah.

## Appendix A

CL: Do you feel like the climate camps kind of almost like an energy producing space through kind of solidarity and kind of creativity.

J: Well it definitely is isn't it because as I was saying before the energising things are when there's a lot of people together, um it's a big example of that.

CL: Do you think it's just the solidarity that produces that?

J: Yeah, solidarity and also the um the sense of being part of something that's quite powerful, so that was you know when I was at Kingsnorth people made loads of sacrifices but at the end of the day we didn't compromise with the police and we kept them off the site, so um that showed people what their power is.

CL: That was my last question.

J: Was it. The end! Was that alright?

CL: Yeah.

J: Was it similar or different to other interviews?

CL: This is the first one I've done.

J: Oh so it's the same as all of them.

CL: Yes [laughs]

J: [laughs] How many are you planning to do for your research?

CL: I think as many as I can. I don't want to kind of interrupt people when they're doing something. So it's hard to catch people.

**Interview two**

CL: I'm doing, I'm kind of writing about emotional energy kind of stuff at the moment to do with activism, I just wanted to find out if kind of activists think that energy and that kind of side of energy is important to their activism kind of, what do you think?

N: Um can you just

CL: What explain?

N: Just what do you mean by...

CL: kind of I suppose your kind of, there's kind of the energy is internal kind of and not necessarily kind of being tired you might just feel kind of, I don't know kind of mentally maybe mentally kind of tired or that sort of thing, do you get it?

N: Ok, alright, I think I get what you're doing um, I suppose physically like a lot of what activists do end up being quite draining, there's a lot of running around and all that sort of stuff, but I guess when you see the bigger picture, when you see what your trying to do you know that after you've done one thing that you can't just sort of sit back and rest on your laurels, you know that there is something else that needs to be done and um you can see how everything fits into the steps towards meeting your goal. Err so that's I guess what kind of gets you out of bed the next morning, that's what, that's what err, that's how you find the time out of everyday to do the kind of activisty stuff out of all the regular kind of stuff that goes and yeah.

CL: So do you feel it kind of influences your activism kind of how your feeling, kind of how your energies feeling? Or is it just constant?

## Appendix B

N: Um, there'll always be, there'll always be ups and downs, um because, because you do have a plan to how a campaign goes you know you can, you know when kind

of something's beginning when your particular points wrong or your, or the schedule, where you need to apply pressure um, and it all builds up err, it all builds up to moments when you know in advance what those are so it's the work that goes into things because it's not like you're doing the same thing just all the time, hoping it comes together, it's a variety of different things at different times, um, and it's the excitement of wanting to do it well and again seeing where it fits into the bigger picture. So in the campaign about focusing on RBS you know that early April when it's financial return, the financial statements are made that's a key point in the year to get attention to make a link the financial departments with the environmental departments, so you know that only comes round once a year so you've got to take advantage of it, it's not something you can just do at any other time, um, yeah.

CL: I suppose you've been to climate camp a couple of times so are there any kind of, I suppose places in the camp where you feel kind of almost empowered or inspired or energised kind of you know for doing activism?

N: Um, the whole atmosphere just being here makes a big difference in itself, err, cus you know you're with, you're meeting people kind of who are involved in similar things, who you might not have seen for a while, so there's a kind of a relaxed reunion atmosphere to it but it's also, but also you want to plan for future stuff, err, for what you want to do next, yeah so coming out of different workshops some things capture your imagination and you want to be doing things and suddenly you think what can I do about this when I go home, um, so there was on eon Tar Sands um that I was at yesterday where you can hear, where you heard about their first hand experiences of living with these projects, um but there are some others that are just more discussions that are err interesting

## Appendix B

but perhaps, and I guess they're not really designed to be inspirational in themselves.

CL: Do you ever feel kind of more, kind of energised in certain places, activist places, or with certain groups, or bigger groups, or is it when you're actually doing your actions out there?

N: No that's like actually when you're out doing the action that's kind of when you're adrenaline heightens, when you know you're on a timetable, um you've got everything in place, um yes like everyone has their role and err you just have to do a kind of what you've agreed to do, what your role is like everybody else so that sort of makes sure the whole thing goes well, your plan, that you deliver on the plan rather than it just being made up along the way. Um I mean those are the best times when your, when your doing the action um because then you get the real sense that your actually doing something, because you can plan for ages and ages but that's just a discussion and what happens outside the pub or meeting room is what counts, you know it's the adrenaline rush um which means that it's also quite physically draining but you know that you want to keep on doing it.

CL: Do you think through your activism you're kind of striving for a better future kind of emotional as well as kind of environmentally and justice, you know like a future where people are happier or kind of happier with the state of the world and that kind of thing?

N: Um, sorry like...

CL: Do you want me to repeat it?

N: Yeah, Yeah.

## Appendix B

CL: Well, through peoples activism they want a better future kind of environmentally not damaging and kind of where it's more just, but do you think you're also kind of want a future where people are kind of happier in themselves or with the world.

N: In themselves almost like activism is a bit like a never ending thing because for a period of time you're focused on one thing, sometimes you achieve what you're trying to change, sometimes you don't, um but then you know along further down the line other things will capture, so, will capture your imagination that make you angry, that make you want to change things um, err...

CL: You can disagree if you want.

N: No, no, I mean sort of we all obviously we want a more sustainable world, free from fear, free from want, um in a sense, you know and that's a it's utopian, um but it's not, what we're trying to do is like small steps towards that, even if we sort of know that um that's a never ending task, so you know just because the goal is so big doesn't mean that the little things we can do are just futile, um but it does mean that we are constantly motivated by a sense of injustice and um dissatisfaction I think, but it's...

CL: Have you ever kind of experienced during your activism real kind of highs and kind of joys, feeling really happy maybe because it's going well or just feeling the solidarity or something?

N: Um, well I guess obviously when things go well, you know when your campaign is doing well err um because that's what you set out to do, or when there are particular moments along the way when you know that these are key moments um and if you get this next step right that's a massive step so it makes you really excited, it makes you really optimistic rather than kind of um you know it's a bit of pessimism that kind of leads you into pessimistic

## Appendix B

dissatisfaction that leads me to campaign in the first place, um, sorry I've forgotten, what was it?

CL: Oh, just kind of are there ever any kind of highs or joys or euphoria or something?

N: Yeah, I guess it's when we win err cus that's why we're here, um, to achieve our goals whatever they are, um which is why it's so important kind of when you start off to have kind of clear goals so you know when those lines are crossed and when you can kind of say right I've done what I came to do, rather than it just err, rather than just some vague goals that you can never really point to and say that yes we've done that, err so also the highs, um the moments of euphoria which kind of make you look forward to goals which is why you put in the work to make those happen.

CL: Do you feel your activism kind of contributes to your kind of happiness or fulfilment?

N: Um, yeah I think it does but it's also partly because you know here everyone's motivated by different philosophies um but we all agree about climate change and kind of things that need to happen to tackle it, um, so like I said as a um as a I think a reasonably religious person um being at climate camp campaigning on climate change is a outlook of, a reflection on my kind of Christian vision of, social vision of what the world should be like, um but I don't, that doesn't have to be shared, that kind of philosophy doesn't have to be shared with everyone else and probably isn't but we can agree on what happens at the end of it, err that's what kind of that's what draws me back over and over again to fulfil that philosophical vision.

CL: Do you ever kind of experience kind of burnout during activism?

## Appendix B

N: Um, yeah I guess you don't know quite realise it's burnout till kind of after, there are times when you just, you've just had enough, you're never going to get anywhere with something, small moments like that, err and you do constantly have to like re-motivate yourself you know after a period of time when it doesn't feel like you're getting anywhere. Um sure there have been those moments, especially when you've put a lot of effort into it, one thing it does kind of make you do is almost to err, because you put so much work into it you almost expect everyone else to put so much work into it and then you become disappointed a bit disillusioned, but you just remind yourself that everyone has a different role and they do different things, so as long as you can kind of see what the bigger, it's going back to reminding yourself what your whole place in achieving the campaign goal is.

CL: Um, are there certain emotions that kind of affect your kind of energy for activism; anger or kind of or whatever kind of drive you in doing your activism, or to do the activism in the first place?

N: Yeah, I guess you do have to be really become really passionate about these things because you can't persuade other people if you kind of look disinterested yourself, um and you know you don't, campaigns don't win just kind of based on rational arguments their based on, they win because they are able to persuade people emotionally that this is important to them, that people do care, that what they do can make a difference. Um, so yeah I mean I won't be on, I wouldn't go on, like when I go on marches and I bring friends along um I see that, I see that, that's part of um you know I have to I'm showing them kind of why this is so important to me, um and that kind of advocacy has to be inherently optimistic so you do have to kind of err remind yourself what your trying to tell them that these problems seem so huge so but there's something all of us can do.

CL: Are there any ways that you find that you have to kind of sustain your energy for activism or does it just kind of sustain itself, you know just always there?

## Appendix B

N: Um, I think at a basic level like your concern with the issue never really goes away, um it's just the difference between concern and actual activism, um and that you do need, there are times when, during the year, when you just do need to just not do anything related to the campaign which kind of recharges your batteries, um.

CL: Just kind of relax.

N: Yeah, like not thinking about it, um but the good thing about that is when you're not doing anything other people are and so you know when you hear about what they're doing it makes you want to get involved again.

CL: Have there been any times during activism when the feelings of a group or kind of the energeticness of the group or the mood has kind of transferred you so that you're all kind of almost feeling the same or feeling as motivated?

N: Um, I think that happens it almost has to happen when you're out actually doing actions, um because you all each of you all kind of wants the thing to go well so you

become, so you know there's no point really, the time for argument has gone you're just there to um agreed between yourselves what needs to be done as quickly as possible, so I guess that's when activists are at their most cooperative.

CL: I suppose the final question is just sort of do feel kind of the most successful actions have been where you've been the most positive, or has that just been the result?

N: Has what been the result, sorry?

CL: When an actions gone well has it been connected to feeling positive?

## **Appendix B**

N: When it's gone well, when you feel something's gone well it's because you kind of want it to go well by definition or you have already been positive about what it is that you can achieve and therefore um what you will achieve if that makes sense kind of um...you do have to be going to these things believing that you can that you are making a difference, you know just because you go into it optimistic you, at the end of the day even if things doesn't go to plan you can still look back and see what you can take away for the future, what you can learn, um and what you want to do better and then you want there to be a next time. It seems a bit of an odd suggestion that you can, that you can maybe be a bit downbeat doing an action, I think if you were downbeat you wouldn't be doing it in the first place.

**Interview three**

CL: Ok, so I was just wondering with your kind of work as a well-being person what kind of issues do you have to deal with is it just kind of burnout or trauma or is it kind of...

K: Um, this year and last year are quite different, because last year the policing at Kingsnorth was really really heavy there was a lot more kind of actual trauma, people were feeling traumatised because of the police. Um, this year nothing like that's come up and we've very much just been in the role of like people who've been like out in the elements in the field just wanting like extra blankets and stuff, and people wanting actually a space where they can go where camp business isn't discussed, because here it's like there's no break, like you think you're sitting down to chill and then someone comes and they want to know your opinion about this, or if you can come to a meeting, or if you can get a list together for something, and there's, it's literally like non-stop, and I think it's really important to have a space where people can just come and just, just chill, because it's actually not possible out there in the camp. And so most people are happy to sort themselves out, they just want to come in and be by themselves, and like I have done, just now actually, some one on one with someone, um, and um just thinking about confidentiality as well, um but basically something that happened at the camp um triggered some stuff for her and we ended up talking through like things that are going on in her life generally and, but it is quite confusing because at the camp it's, the camp can bring up things for people because it's quite intense um and it's a question of, it's hard to close that down if it's on your mind but it's also not really the space to open that up, so yeah.

CL: Um, what kind of methods or techniques do you use to kind of help people is it just kind of talking to people, active... is it called active listening?

## Appendix C

K: That's it, it's active listening, yeah, and we don't say that we offer counselling because counselling is more about like a contractual relationship that's going to be on going with people who are really qualified to deal with deeper issues that might come

up, so we don't say it's counselling but active listening and counselling skills are like very closely related, it's quite a fine line actually, but yeah it's active listening.

CL: And do you find that quite effective, kind of at helping people?

K: Well, I'm like training to be like a psychotherapist, I'm like a trainee, so yeah I believe that like listening to people does like, does really work because when you don't feel heard that's a form of oppression, and being heard helps you feel like a person and I think that's very much in line with the camp ethos where we're making decisions by consensus decision making which means everybody gets heard so those things are kind of, yeah, in line here I think, yeah.

CL: Um, do you find that your work ever kind of affects you negatively, like kind of the stress of the people...

K: Well, um, well right now after having done a fairly long one on one I do feel drained, um but I don't feel negative I feel like, um I really want to be useful at the camp, um supporting activists in a caring role that's why I'm in well-being and also in the medic tent, um so I feel good that I got a chance to practice my skills that's gonna be helpful for my studies and I just feel good that I've been useful to someone so yeah. Yeah, Yeah, I mean I think if there had been actual traumas with the police and stuff to deal with probably I would experience a bit of second hand traumatisation as well, when you hear about things that have happened to people, but that hasn't happened this camp so.

CL: Ok, um, is it ok if I ask you a bit about your own activism?

K: Sure.

CL: I'm writing about this stuff, kind of emotional energy kind of side of things.

K: Ok.

CL: Do you feel that's important to your activism, kind of the way your kind of emotional energy's feeling?

K: Yeah, definitely, I think that um in order to like, I mean if you're an activist then you're also working, which obviously a lot of us are, everyday you have two days in one, you get home from work and you don't chill you get on with activist stuff whether it's researching, or networking, or meeting with people or, um, yeah and you need a lot of energy for that and in order to have that energy you need to feel positive, you need to feel your movements going somewhere, you need to feel like there's people around you who are also working for the same thing, um, if things get negative like if you've been traumatised, or recently arrested, or, or you feel like actions aren't going anywhere, then yeah it's really hard to look at your inbox let alone get on board with like any actions that are happening, so it's important to stay positive and stay inspired definitely, yeah.

CL: Um, do you feel there's any kind of places or spaces in the camp which are really kind of energising, or empowering, for activism?

K: Well, um, yeah, it's funny actually, I mean I don't have like the big picture of everyone who's here and everything that's going on in the camp but um I think that um, I hope that a lot of the workshop spaces are inspiring, for some people they're coming here and they're learning things about climate change for the first time, and they're learning how to take direct action first time, and I know that the first camp I went to definitely the workshops were inspiring, definitely it was inspiring that there's so many places for support here, action support and legal,

## Appendix C

um and I mean the camp in general, um yeah there's a lot of places where there's a lot of energy for that, you're constantly talking to people in your neighbourhood or whatever who share your view, you don't have to defend your view, everyone there, it's taken for granted that you're on that wavelength and that's really energising, to be with others like that, so yeah.

CL: Are there certain kind of activist places, or kind of people, groups, maybe the group you're involved with that you feel kind of more energised or ready for kind of action?

K: Um, for me like it's yeah, in my neighbourhood with the people I know from back home um, because I just feel like activists in general are some of the most resourceful and creative and energetic and inspiring people that I've ever met so just to be with people like that, who are also my friends, yeah is absolutely amazing, yeah.

CL: Through your activism do you kind of strive for a better future emotionally as well as kind of, you know kind of fairer and more sustainable?

K: Definitely, yeah I think um it's sort of related to what um, to what I was saying before like the camp is a space where everybody can be heard and yeah that's very political cus it's like reversing the power structures um but it's also, makes you stand back and think wow this is what it is to be a person, my view counts, and if I want something done then it's DIY, I can do it, and you're not relying on the authorities, you're not relying on services brought in to do something, and yeah that, that is emotionally really positive cus it yeah just makes you feel like a person, so yeah.

CL: And have you ever kind of experienced really kind of highs or happiness during activism?

## Appendix C

K: Um, yeah actually the most euphoric time funnily enough was um the first time I got arrested, obviously that was bad and being in the cell was bad, but I wasn't arrested alone I was arrested with a lot of other people and afterwards like there was a lot of us, I won't say how many cus you might know what the action was, but um, there was a lot of us and we came back together and all met in one space and shared with each other and then fifteen of us from like my hometown um like found somewhere to sleep over and like actually slept over in just this big nest of mattresses in somebody's lounge, and we were all together you know and I think that, sometimes seeing the police as a common enemy, like bonds you in this unbelievable way and yeah that kind of bonding has given me those euphoric times, and also like before you do an action, if it's gonna be illegal particularly, there's a lot of anxiety, like where I feel a lot of anxiety and so when you've done it you just can't believe you did it, you think wow I never thought I'd do that and I've done it and yeah you're just really inspired by actually what you can do, yeah.

CL: Um, do you feel that your activism kind of contributes to your happiness and kind of your fulfilment?

K: Yeah, I mean I don't know if I'm going to say happiness because like I feel like a lot of activists are carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders, like we are constantly, we are not believing the fairytales that governments and corporations are spinning us about how it's all gonna be ok, like we know that it's not ok, we feel like you know, well I can't really say we, I can't speak for everyone, but I and a lot of people I think feel like things are properly fucked so a lot of the time it's, yeah it's pretty sad and pretty desperate, but it does contribute to my fulfilment because I feel like I know I'm right, I know I'm working for what's right, and I feel useful. I mean if you're working in an advertising company or something, you're working all day and it's like what for, you're actually doing useless work, and this work that I'm doing like I'm not getting

## Appendix C

any money for it but I know that actually it's the most useful thing that I could be doing, so yeah.

CL: And have you ever experienced kind of burnout during activism, like kind of the reverse?

K: Um, like again, like that time that I said I felt euphoria like after getting arrested, like that was in the next 24 hours but after that was a real low, I wouldn't say it was burnout because that be like, you know over a long period, kind of getting worn down, but it was a definite, a definite low, I think it was a kind of post-traumatic stress, um, yeah, yeah so I'd say, yeah some lows when it all goes horribly wrong, and being on the wrong side of the law like doesn't feel good because you feel you're being condemned by mainstream society so that's, that's pretty demoralising.

CL: How did you deal with it, was just kind of the support of the group?

K: Um, exactly, yeah there were many other people in the same situation and we actually specifically arranged meetings, um where we could do a go round and all be heard about where we're all at and stuff and um, yeah and then like going, um, going back to be bailed or whatever and people are, people who've got a bit more money are contributing for the train fares and stuff, and um people who didn't have to go back to be bailed like came along you know just to be there and wait for you when you're coming out of the station or wherever, so yeah it's definitely the support of other people and particularly like um some of my closest friends and like my lover are all activists so I definitely feel like we're all in it together, and if I was in it on my own there's just no way like yeah it's gotta be in a collective, yeah.

CL: Um, do feel kind of certain emotions affect your energy for activism, like you know do you feel you're driven by kind of anger or any other emotions?

## Appendix C

K: Um, I am angry, I'm angry about the oppression I see everywhere, I also feel guilty that um, I have white guilt basically like I'm privileged, like even if I moan and groan about the terrible things that have happened to me, like I'm privileged like I'm so privileged, and um yeah so those are some negative ones, but the main feeling that drives me is feeling of empowerment, about the things that I can do um and a feeling of inspiration like being surrounded by people striving for high ideals and feeling like certain actually that I at least know what's right even if it's really hard to achieve that.

CL: And how do you kind of sustain your energy for activism, is it just like kind of constant, you know it doesn't need sustaining it's just kind of always there or does it sometimes need a boost?

K: Um, yeah that's a interesting one, at the moment like I have been going, going, and going for about a year and a half, I feel like actually pretty soon I'm gonna be wondering where that constant energy is coming from, um yeah that's a good question

for me actually, I mean definitely the people around me spur me on, um hearing about what other people have done, I mean for example like if you read the mainstream news you don't hear really about activists but if you read indy-media you see that there's struggles going on all around the world everywhere, and activist are doing stuff all the time and um yeah that keeps me going to hear those stories. Um, yeah and we do, I mean we congratulate each other like when, when an action has been done we do a debrief, we think about what went well, we think about what we can learn, but we also like congratulate each other on the fact that like we've been brilliant like to give it a go, so that yeah that esteem that comes from that as well, yeah.

## Appendix C

CL: Have there been any times during activism when kind of the way people are feeling, kind of the mood or the energies transferred between everyone, like you're all feeling kind of the same, kind of synchronised almost?

K: Yeah, like again like going to that euphoric time, um definitely felt like that cus we were just so bonded, we were all in exactly the same position, um like, up to the point where I felt like people who hadn't been in that situation could not understand, and I felt really separated from those other people cus I felt really bonded um with the others in that situation, um, yeah, and at the camps as well you know you're having a lot of discussions like a lot of people have been saying about Saturday night at the camp was demoralising because people from outside came in and just to get drunk and stuff, and hearing conversations at the camp feels like a lot of people are feeling the same way actually um...yeah I don't know I wish I could think of something else to answer that question, is that helpful that?

CL: Yeah that's fine.

K: Yeah, ok, cool.

CL: Just my kind of last question was about kind of, when you've felt it's gone most successfully your activism, has it been when everyone's kind of feeling positive or has that not played a role in it or has it helped?

K: Oh, when it's gone right is it because...

CL: When you've felt it went well.

K: And was feeling positive before action a cause of..., um I think that um you definitely couldn't do it if you were feeling negative about it, if you were feeling I can't do this I can't do this, um it wouldn't work, like you do have to feel like you can do it and you do have to feel positive about it, but that on it's own can't pull off an action, you need cooperation you really need to have long meetings

## Appendix C

thinking everything through about what can be effective, you need everyone cooperating together, but yeah being positive about it is definitely like a ground for all that, it couldn't happen like without that, mmm, cool.

**Interview four**

CL: I'm mainly interested in how people have sustained their energy, both emotional and physical, at the camp against such adversity; constant looming threat of eviction, aggression and hostility from workers, and the extreme weather conditions etc

A: Sustaining the overall energy of the camp, or "morale" of the campaign, so far hasn't been a major issue. I think that's due to the fact that what we're doing is really new and exciting and constantly evolving. It's something that people involved have wanted to do for a while, and the constant need to be on your toes and respond to the latest bit of machinery that Scottish Coal throw at us, or the latest inflammatory press release from the Estate, generates its own energy. There's also a large flux of people coming through the camp, who come with new energy, or people who go back and forth. It's always great when people show up just for a few days to do an action or two as that injects energy into the camp. Emotionally, for the whole campaign, we've had many successes and have done an amazing thing by slowing them down for so long, which is empowering. Physically, it's great to be outdoors and feel like you're working - especially during the summer when you could be working until 10:30pm and not notice how late it was. Most of us would take living outside and building things with our hands over living in a town or city and sitting in front of computers all day. I think living somewhere like Mainhill Wood, especially when you're trying to defend it, gives you a definite sense of place, where you become attached to the land. Just experiencing the changing seasons over the past 6 months, the colours, the change in wildlife abundance, makes you really appreciate what it is that we're trying to protect. For individuals at the camp, or people who have been involved long-term, it might be a slightly different story as this kind of campaign can really grind you down. Essentially, it's a war of attrition between those that want a mine, and those that don't. And unfortunately, those that want it have all the access to money and resources that they need. So we have to make up for our

## Appendix D

comparatively small resources by working harder. Activist burn-out is something that is important to watch out for, and make sure that people get lots of support and breaks off-site when they need them. Watching the site get trashed by heavy machinery day after day can also be pretty demoralising for individuals who have been there a while. Seeing places that

you used to walk through destroyed, or watching deer running away from harvesting equipment is awful.

CL: I visited briefly at the last gathering and people came across as really positive and optimistic and I was just wondering if this, their positive outlook, played a role in powering people's energy?

A: The Solidarity Camp is a community of amazing people. It's really inspiring to live somewhere like Mainhill, and meet all of these people who give up their "other" lives to come and live in the mud and the cold with us. I think its this sense of community, belonging maybe, and the closeness and supportiveness of the people living there that keeps people optimistic and wanting to keep fighting.

**Interview five**

CL: I've got a load of questions but if you don't want to answer any of them... I was just wondering how long climate camps been here, have you been here the whole time?

M: Camp for Climate Action has been camped out in Trafalgar Square stay until the 19<sup>th</sup> for the duration of the COP15 talks in Denmark.

CL: And the people here do they stay for a few days or

M: Um, we've had core people, um, maintained our media done off site. Flyers done off site. And there's been core climate campers on site at all times for visitors so a lot of people have coming in the day time to do outreach we've been talking to members of the public who don't usually

CL: How do you maintain your emotional energy for activism, how have you kind of sustained your energy during your time here at the camp

M: Um, I suppose it's kind of evolved I mean before everybody went off to Copenhagen we had far greater numbers of activists and it's actually settled down into a community, and in another week I think it would have evolved into something else. Um I think the bottom line is we've said we'll be here till the 19<sup>th</sup> so it's been really cold, it's getting colder but it's been the kind of activism I've experimented with before this is the most serious it's been where so you can talk to people till your blue in the face about climate change but it's started coming in in the last few days like "oh my god your still there", "oh my god its so cold, why are you here", and somehow the message goes in a different way because your passion has aroused them rather than the science, and so it's an emotional engagement, and actually at the Vestas camp that was very similar when we're being evicted people and that sort of thing and people go "oh my god they're still there", "look we've had gales, 100 mile an hour winds and their

## Appendix E

camped out on a roundabout, why?”. Well, because there’s been an injustice and people engage with that and you go from being those annoying

do-gooders to the underdog with an important message and people seem to be responding really well to that.

[Argument in the background]

M: I’m trying to do an interview. You don’t need to shout just ask very nicely.

M: we’ve become for the homeless population in Westminster. Um, I don’t think Westminster council will tell you the numbers, we certainly don’t know the numbers, um we do know that there are about 30 rough sleepers that have that’s probably done us a favour, but we all have our damaged people and a lot of wasted people and addressing the capitalist system you know rough sleeping is a part of that, homes are built for profit people with children, which is right, but single people are completely ignored unless their vulnerable and their not being heard, but its like the idea that we have issues in society and everyone just agrees to not talk about it and deal with it is very sad, and we have had people sort of going look at you lot you look terrible you can’t talk about climate change and well you’re always looking for the excuse this is capitalism, if you put profit before people this is the community you get. People here are ex-army, we’ve got an ex-sergeant, we’ve had people that have worked in the catering industry which you never get round to getting your own home, people who have split up with their partners – the misses has thrown them out their see their children, camp for climate action has come around to the idea that, we’re like that already, that if people are given an environment that’s um, where they can be useful, then your useful then you’ll be useful. We live in a society where you’re going to have your sleeping bag set fire to, on your own you’re vulnerable but together your strong and um one of the things that I hope will come out of this people who are vulnerable and on their own will get together and sort out their

## Appendix E

disagreements and you go get water, you go get fire, a cup of tea, lets build a shelter, where is another question because you know all our land is owned. You know when we came into Trafalgar square everyone said “haven’t the police tried to throw you off” it’s up to the council to throw us off, they can use the police but the police aren’t that interested, um and they understand that we practice non-violent direct action and um we’re very cheeky and we do as we like and we don’t take no for an answer I think if a group of people got together in Trafalgar square the day after we left they’d get very different treatment and that’s wrong, we shouldn’t have a police that treats groups of society differently just because of their circumstances rather than their behaviour

CL: Have you had any problems with police?

M: No, I mean we’re still riding high on what we call the Tomlinson affect which was at the G20 meltdown when they kettled us and they completely destroyed climate camp, people lost everything, they got injured, and somebody died at meltdown and there were people from climate camp involved in the meltdown it was just providing different kinds of activities on that day for various groups so... the police have been very softly softly they don’t want any, they don’t want images in the media of them beating people wanting to do something on climate change during the and I think the police are coming to realise because we’ve been talking to them long enough about climate change, I mean a year ago when we were at Kingsnorth closing down Kingsnorth power station most of the coppers were climate change deniers, that’s not the case now.

CL: So what have been kind of your high points?

M: Well the actions themselves and um I think um personally it’s been an exemplary program of actions this week, so on Monday we went to Canada House which is right by Trafalgar square and took a tea party in the road, we blockaded the road and gave people an activity, and for a lot of people they’ve

## Appendix E

been on marches but they've never put their bodies in the way, it's very different to be on the pavement or a road that's closed on an organised event to actually just launch into the road we're going to cut off the means of production, we're not going to let traffic through and um raise an embarrassment and get into the Canadian specifically because it was a Tar Sands action. Um I hope it was empowering for people you know now they've taken direct action they realise that they're not going to get arrested for just stepping into the road, they know they can do more, the next day we went and defaced the Canadian flag, we went up a ladder at the front of the building, again the police facilitated that very well, it got a lot of coverage on the media and television, and it was a newly formed affinity group, most of us hadn't worked together in this small number, and that was very empowering and useful for future events. And then Wednesday we did some performance art and we went and interfered with the polar bear and poured a kettle of hot water over him with an RBS logo on it, because Marks and Spencer's sponsored the polar bear we said it's not just climate change it's RBS funded climate chaos, and the artist was actually there doing an interview and we thought that sort of makes it even more dramatic so we carried on and the artist was delighted and insisted we had a conversation which his camera crew filmed and made us do it again, and what was interesting on that because that's a very different sort of action um but I had a conversation with him about the fact that people could smash the polar bear or like us pour hot water over it or you could kick it or put your hand on it but really you could just put your finger tips on it and you'd still be affecting it but it wouldn't melt so quickly, and I got something out of that and I don't often on an action because you know we not looking at carbon footprints we should be looking at carbon finger tips, that's a different way of thinking and that could nudge a whole load of people in a positive direction. So that wasn't actually stopping anything that was more of an inspiring action, we should basically call it a stunt, um today we're going to the Danish embassy to complain about their policing, we've got bags of rotten fruit together, I've never really been involved in anything I'd say that violent because throwing fruit could cause somebody to slip over and that is a concern but if we actually

## Appendix E

splat them on the building that's really funny and I think it allows us to get out some of those tensions, you know everyone thinks that people who throw things or smash things are bad people and not passionate people, and um they probably have an understanding that non-violent direct action is great fun and very fluffy and blockading a road for an hour is a start it's a launch but its not going to really make any difference you've got to cut off the means of production or make it too expensive or make it impossible to police or the insurance too expensive or um you know actually inspire politicians to go well actually the people have a right to be angry what can they do, they can write a petition, we ignore it, you know downing street petitions what are they about, bloody waste of time they are. And so that's today and then tomorrow we're making placards out of cardboard and put them round our necks on string and we're going into to this government department, department of community and we're going to take a picnic, we're going to take our sleeping bags and go and camp out in their reception area, and um some of us have experience with these sort of occupations and what we'll probably do is negotiate a time, like we'll take two hours, we'll go a bit longer than they want, an hour and half, and we'll have made our point, and we'll possibly leave a route so that people can still use the building but let them remember why they're going to work because I don't you know, they're very interested in giving councils the tools for counting the number of rough sleepers, which I don't think is very affective, but in their housing policy you don't see them addressing maybe different ways of dealing with rough sleeping, like it tends to be hostels you know where everyone's by themselves and actually what people need when they're recovering from alcoholism or mental health issues or just degradation of health due to rough sleeping they need communities, communities are where you can be useful and have self worth, none of us are useful on our own, and it's a good metaphor for dealing with climate change and it's a direct response to our experience in Trafalgar square, that's the beauty of direct action, the creativity in it, and the fact that two weeks of living with rough sleepers on the streets has taught us a lot as well, they're made sure we've got food and the way they've protected us at night we've had a dry site, non-racist, non-violent, non-sexist and non-ageist, and everyone's equal, at the same time

## Appendix E

some people might know a little more about something and you share that and even old pops here is our mascot I think we've all gained from it

CL: Have there been any low-points

M: Um, waking up with the whole right hand side of your body completely soaking wet because your tents leaked is not very nice, err having a complete nutty woman on site that you know made me, well didn't make me, but inspired me to harbour violent thoughts, you know just that frustration, that's a low point for me but I got over it and you know have addressed those sort of issues in the past, so um and err I don't think there were I mean yes your toes are cold got loads of sleep, I've actually got loads of sleep, although there's that cold thing in the background, because I feel safe, I feel so

safe here, and because of the people outside round the fire, and I think I'm a changed activist for it everyone here's changed, so I think the low points, we haven't really had any proper low-points you know even when the authorities were trying to get us out even that was kind of comedy really, we never felt threatened

CL: How did they try and get you out

M: Telling us to go now; "can you go now please?", just play the game, "you can't be here without permission", ok we phoned Boris Johnson office we've had a letter saying you need permission to be here, Boris is in Copenhagen, shame, well you just tell Boris that we're here doing his job empowering people to take action on climate change

[interruption]

CL: What's kind of the atmosphere at the camp been like, has it been kind quite a positive atmosphere?

## Appendix E

M: it can be a bit chaotic at time, mistakes are made and lessons are learnt, and I mean we probably have come into the situation quite naively but we do have a lot of experience, in my experience like the big camp, you know camp for climate action, we had three thousand people, we had more on site in the day time, it's the same issues you get at any festival and you know people that care about climate change and take action do get very drunk and leery in the evenings so we're dealing with the same sort of issues, especially when you get a clash of cultures like you get maybe local people that aren't, that don't know much about climate change, they come new to the place, um there's actually I would say there's been less trouble here in Trafalgar square but then we are dealing with a total cross section of society, obviously there are people who come in the day time but in terms of the overnight it's less traumatic than climate camp.

CL: What's the affect of kind of the stuff going on in Copenhagen been, has that affected here?

M: Um, when the talks broke down that influenced, the arrests influenced, the beatings influenced a whole cross section of society, yes the anarchists get out in as much power as they can muster given that most people are in Copenhagen, um but it is people who are walking in off the streets involved in NGOs and I think from my point of view um you know I'm very aware of the performance aspect of protest and you know how you perform to the media to give them the narrative they want and um one of the has been going for a long time this idea that you have the good protestor and the bad protestor well actually just because your wearing and mask and wear black doesn't make you a bad protestor it actually makes you a more effective protestor, so for instances when camp for climate action organised the great climate swoop um at Ratcliffe-on-Soar back in October, might have been September, well anyway you can check the dates, it was September, we were pulling down the fences, we were climbing on the fences and some people, there were an awful lot of people that well I don't want to be arrested, well why are you coming to close down a coal fired power station,

## Appendix E

ok, and err people went further than they meant to because it was just fun, like that empowerment of ripping down the fences, pictures went up on YouTube suddenly everyone's on this going "take that down right now I've got my face out and I'm doing something wrong" it's like well why don't you wear a mask, you're a climate protestor and you've just ripped down a fence, you've just caused criminal damage, look you either want to cause criminal damage and not get caught in which case wear a mask or you want to cause criminal damage and you don't mind getting caught so enjoy the publicity, or if it's neither of that don't do it. It has actually addressed this issue of if you wear a mask you're a bad protestor, and I think it's also an interesting thing today, we'll see how it goes, that everyone will be in black and we'll be in our own uniform and we will look organised and we'll be bigger than the normal mass of people that might turn up masked like that, I mean I've never gone out masked and black ever in my life, today's my first, and um and being together in that identity I think it could seem very threatening in the same way that um when you get a whole load of all in their black masks that can seem very threatening, we'll be armed with rotten fruit they'll be armed with pepper spray, CS gas, batons and riot shields I assume

[interruption: "will they?"]

M: I assume so because um they will overreact before there's anything to react to and then cause a response, um it's up to how we respond in our black, if we can keep the moral high ground and all be blacked up then that's fantastic. Um yeah so that identity thing, or non-identity, community, organising that's what the organising, I used be involved in Climate Rush and we used to wear sashes and even that it was just so powerful, 800 people all wearing sashes all you know operating as one, all wearing costumes so here we are we've been doing all these actions that involve picnics and now we're blacking up which is as old as protest itself really

[interruption]

## Appendix E

M: I think, that's 1985, I don't know anyone that wasn't touched by the Battle for Beanfield that was there or involved in the conflict at that time but we have moved on a long way I mean funnily enough we have things like camp for climate action out of that convoy movement so to a certain extent it's all related, you know sort of skills and stuff but I think we're in a new era, and... it's contextual and it's a thing and it's why people feel in certain ways and why people behave a certain way on the front line, and um I think now with climate change it's so like the road protests were about trees, the Battle of Beanfield you know was about the right to gather at Stonehenge, Margaret Thatcher saying we should get married have 2.4 kids and behave ourselves I've never respected it because it looked after the people who could look after themselves and just completely cut loose all others, so why should I behave in that society.

CL: Has it been energising, the space of the camp and the action?

M: I think yes, amazingly you know creative and while it's not as big as the camp for climate action or a festival or anything we might want to compare it to, in terms of the outreach work it's done in empowering people to take direct action I don't think it can be knocked.

CL: Has it been a quite a kind of happy atmosphere

M: I think the thing is, um in some people you know what would you be doing otherwise, I think when you're on the front line doing your best, even though you think if I had more flyers, more people, more time, more it would be better, if you are doing your best for climate change, it effectively is the most effective thing, you can't be doing any more and therefore it's a very empowering uplifting feeling, when we went to Kingsnorth climate camp um they had blockaded the road the cops sort of miles away from the camp, so to unload a kitchen you had to like walk your gas stove and everything miles, I was walking down this country lane with a wheelbarrow full of kitchen tat going you know

## Appendix E

what there is nothing more that I could be doing on this sunlit evening than moving the kitchen into climate camp, that is the most worthwhile thing I could be doing at that moment because that whole camp then empowers people to go and take direct action, um so I think the empowering side of it and people have shown the climate camp ethos and the way we do things and seeing it work and seeing it work with a sector of the wider community that most would tell you can't work, it's broken, it can't be fixed, the rough sleeping population, and I absolutely think that's wrong, that's so wrong, to see how, you know we had one person ex-army very leery very scary, he's not even aware he's scary he's just angry and the camp agreed to bar him from the fire and the camp but he refused to leave, this morning he was cooperating, sharing, cooking, um you know um understands, we discussed his behaviour, has apologised for his behaviour, um which is probably quite a big thing for him, and he's the kind of person and it's quite often the case you get these people who are troublemakers, you get trouble makers who are all on the same side really really powerful so lets not fight amongst ourselves by the way but at the same time because we're open to all; women or older people who might feel threatened and even if the persons only accidentally threatening then that still has to be addressed.

CL: Are there any things that have happened that have been de-energising or draining?

M: There was an event yesterday called feed the five thousand that was happening in Trafalgar Square and I think I thought that it would involve lots of people coming and sharing ideas of waste, eat together and discuss things and we were going to wake up to give tea and coffee to them and we weren't doing the cooking that day, just really greedy people had come for a free lunch that people would do it like that, um so that was a little bit like I didn't want to serve tea to these people because they weren't here to talk they were just here for free food. And we had a really strange woman who was actually quite plausible and said quite plausible things but just acted in really strange sort of psychotic ways

## Appendix E

and she was really undermining, hiding things, moving things and claiming to be things she wasn't, and that was just hard work because she was a very bossy person and she kept telling people what to do and she wasn't adopting the climate camp ethos to do that and it was quite strange I found myself getting very territorial and protective because we have ways of doing things and she wasn't doing it our way that's not me dictating, it's not other people from climate camp dictating we're just sharing her bottom line of defence was this is Trafalgar square I can do what I like and um that was quite depressing, anyway she's disappeared and I don't think she's coming back [interruption] and also like wanting to drop her, just like, sometime she was so overpowering and dominating, she wore me down, made me grit my teeth and you know when the hair on the back of your neck goes up I've had to go away and take a couple of deep breaths, at the bigger climate camp we'd have more people to handle that, you know if somebody pushes your buttons you step away and let people step forward, the highlight actually last night this guy came on, I didn't hear him but apparently he was being really leery, he started talking to people, conversation didn't work, he was probably talking to people from the rough housing comm., rough sleeping community not climate camp activists, anyway we went out to see him because we have a out front policy, with two minutes we're having a cup of tea together, he's the nicest bloke, and we came in here and he asked question after question after question, they were such valid questions, he's in the army he's just got back from Afghanistan and yesterday two of his mates were killed but he doesn't know which ones yet, he doesn't want to be in Afghanistan, it's not why he joined the army, he doesn't think that we can make any difference to change the world any more than he can, he's at the point in Afghanistan where his motivation is if I don't kill that person they're going to kill me, not I'm going to protect democracy, not I'm going to stop the terrorist, but I am here to kill anyone that tries to kill me, it doesn't go any deeper than that, and to have a really valid conversation with a bloke that had actually sobered himself up with a cup of tea to have that conversation and come looking for us that was just like why we're here, for those conversations, because his life has changed and so he's

## Appendix E

CL: How would you describe your experience here overall, if you could sum it up?

M: Um, bloody knackered but I think it will, in a historical context, it will have contributed to a change or a stepping in up of how protest is conducted in this country, like we came in Trafalgar square and we were told you can't do this you don't have permission, it's a public square, we've all completely lost our power and unless *we* claim our power back and say "your laws an ass" which is what I said "the laws an ass", just us you know you can take us off in handcuffs and I'll have my day in court where the judge will say (puts on mock posh voice) "you hung banners in Trafalgar square! Come now girl what are you trying to do, you think you can take action on climate change!", you know it's, and think that's going to be really empowering for people and I hope that the rough sleeping community take part, and the activists we will keep taking spaces and working, welcoming all to our community and to engage in our community, and to work with the understandings we have and um we can find a way of peaceably um changing the system because it can only be through sorting out capitalism, unfortunately as soon as you start addressing capitalism um your heading for trouble because there's a lot of very powerful wealthy people that don't want that changed, and I hope that the police first of all continue to cooperate, and I think the police when we talk to them now we're not talking about climate change we're talking about the fact that well you know who are you protecting, you just arrested me, you took me out of that situation but um I pay my taxes you're my police force and I'm on the side of right, why are you protecting that business that's wrong you know why are you getting up to go to work to protect big business you're here for public order your not here to protect big business and if you are going to protect big business you better be a private army and they better be paying for it not the tax payers and then if it's a private army we can you know address that because it take it out of, away from the state, you know the state should not be protecting bug business it should be protecting the people and at the moment big business is damaging the people with putting profits before

## Appendix E

people and not addressing climate change because there's no money in it for them.

CL: Well that's the end.

M: Ok.

Interview six

CL: Right. So firstly I was just going to ask kind of general sort of, you know, when did you first get involved in kind of activist type stuff?

T: Um... Well, I've always had a like an idea of justice and ecology and stuff so I've always been like involved in campaigning, like even when I was young like 15/16. When I was like 20 I went to Romania to work as an aid relief worker...

CL: Oh right.

T: And err... that was just after like the fall of Ceausescu and like, there was like a real problem out there and err...that gives a real slant on how the world works or maybe doesn't work, like how capitalism hurts people and stuff so pretty much from then onwards like, in different periods of your life you've got time to do different things haven't you so... if you've got a lot of time on your hands, you know, activism, if like you know obviously when two children were being born I wasn't really massively involved in campaigning or *direct action*. It's a funny phrase isn't it?

CL: yeah [laugh]

T: 'Direct Action'. I always like 'Citizen's intervention'.

CL: Yeah.

T: I thought that was quite a nice phrase.

CL: So it's kind of, has it kind of fluctuated or...?

T: Yeah, peaks and troughs definitely, and that goes with the politics of the time. Like 2004, 5, 6 and 7, the Iraq war. And like in 2005 the G8 leader were here in,

## Appendix F

well not *here* in my living room but in Gleneagles so like and the Iraq war had started 12, 10/12 months before that, so like the leaders of the war were here and that was definitely a peak.

CL: Yeah.

T: Do you get what I mean like...?

CL: Yeah.

T: Like as the politics of the world change so like again during like the Israeli bombing of Gaza, um we attempted to blockade the tank factory in Scotswood because BAE systems provide parts to the Israeli military so, you know, what happens globally and what happens in your own life dictates what you can and can't do I guess.

CL: Yeah. Have there ever been any kind of burnout type times?

T: Err, burnout type times.

CL: [laugh]

T: Well at times I have thought oh you know like I've really put a lot effort into somethin'. The Coal mine over at Dipton where the Earth First! thing was, honestly for the first like two years of that there was only me interested cus like [partner's name] from over there that way and I really love the Durham area like the Durham dales, and yet for the first two years of that I was like writing zines, blogspots, going to meetings and just, I don't know about burnout but definitely a bit of disillusionment, about the two year mark of thinking there's only me interested [laughs]. But stuck at it and that's how come all those activists were at Dipton a couple of weeks ago so I'm kind of chuffed about that, but I've certainly err... define, define burnout, sorry?

## Appendix F

CL: I suppose kind of almost dropping out, or, dropping out of activism or feeling like you don't want to do it anymore, it's not working or something.

T: Yeah, definitely a bit of that type. And I think...like if, if we get set in our ways as a movement and don't start criticising and evaluating what we're doing, you know you can criticise something without being like painful about it like you know. So there has been times when I've stopped and really took a stock and thought well is this actually working...you know so yeah there has been times of reflection and disillusionment, absolute frustration, yeah.

CL: Yeah. What kind of affect did they have, did they make you feel kind of you know like you didn't have energy I suppose for activism?

T: Um.

CL: Or was the drive for it still there?

T: ...I think, like I, well like with that coal mine, coal mining thing where I was saying I was just going at it for a couple of years it was more reflective that when I was just thinking well what am I doing wrong here, why aren't people wanting to engage, like why is everyone going off to Kingsnorth and you know trying to sort out Medway's problems when we've got loads of open cast mines here. I had to really reflect on why that wasn't working, so that was, yeah. But after the eviction of Mainhill, which I was at, like, Mainhill was a big journey for us cus we like, we, I was one of the group who helped take the site.

CL: Oh right.

T: So I helped really you know with a lot of the structures that were there and the finances with, you know it was. Once I was massively involved like the people

## Appendix F

that lived there but yeah I mean I took the site. So to see it at the end, to see like, I don't know if you've ever witnessed an eviction it's pretty horrible, like err...you and your

friends have put everything into it and then the state turns up with these private companies, the bailiffs and the high sheriff court officers, and like when they take you out the trees they cut the trees down in front of yer to make sure you can't reoccupy them, and then they'll clear a whole area and bulldoze it all into a heap and set it on fire.

CL: God [this imagery I found deeply affective]

T: To make sure it can't be reoccupied, to make sure there's no strategic trees, strategic tunnels...and like it's tiring, as well, tiring. That's one thing I've definitely found out about activism; I need to sleep, at key points, I'm not like well I'm going to be 40 in five years so...

CL: Really?

T: Yeah. So...yeah if you've got a mixture of like quite strong emotions and tiredness, like, yeah, I've come back from Mainhill pretty like pissed off is a good...

[Interruption: children and partner come back from walk]

T: Just a minute.

[Child shouts "We're back!". T: "Can you guys just go in the room while I finish this interview, it'll just be like five minutes more, is that all right guys". Children in chorus shout "NO!". T: "Do it for your dad, five minutes ok and I'll make you hot chocolates". Partner: "That's a good deal". T: "Five minutes and I'll make you hot chocolates". One of the children starts crying]

CL: Oh dear.

T: Arr, they're just tired don't worry.

[Partner trying to calm down children]

T: Are you going to be mega quiet while we just finish this talk?

[Children and partner come and sit with us]

CL: Yeah so we were talking about Mainshill.

T: Well just about. Yeah just at the end of it just a bit like well that was a lot of effort, a lot of energy, a lot of you know to see, just to see it all wiped out, pretty rubbish really.

CL: Yeah. What was it like when you took the site, was it quite inspiring you know everyone coming together doing it and everything?

T: It was yeah, it was like the land belongs supposedly, belongs to all of us in like the wide sense of things but on a bit of paper to...

[child: "The Queen"]

T: One of the queen's relations Douglas Home, Lord Douglas Home so part of our ideology of life is that there's, there should be an equal access to land for everybody so to take back a bit of land was really empowering, to be with a group of people that I know and trust, and still trust, you know very empowering and yeah to see like, to see it before it went, that was it, we were the last group of people to see that little bit of ancient woodland as it should be, before people, you know. Putting tree-houses up and bunkers isn't natural so we saw it on its

## Appendix F

last day before people made a stand, attempted to defend, and so yeah it was very empowering and very invigorating, yeah.

CL: With the thing in London, kind of Greenpeace thing, was that kind of, how did it happen, you know what was the experience of that like?

T: How did it happen?

CL: I mean when it was happening you know what was your experience of it.

T: Right.

CL: Was it quite, was that empowering as well, you know...

T: Yeah, like incredibly. Um I mean again that was like loads of hard work, loads of hard work and you've got to be. Greenpeace have got a very definite way of doing an action right that isn't anarchist at all, there are people that have [interruption: one child whispers "Dad, Dad"] there are people that are like paid by them [One child bursts into noise suddenly] to organise campaigns and organise actions, and they want, they understand that they've got three or four minutes in the news so they want it set out a certain way. So that to me's a little bit difficult cus I believe everybody should have an equal voice, but sometime's you've got to be willing to work outside of your absolute beliefs. But the actual jumping the fence on the lawns of Westminster and climbing up on the [Child: "Parliament!"] Parliament yes [Child shouts "Parliament!". T: "shh, shh, shh"] yeah that was just amazing, absolutely amazing, really [interruption]. Yeah really really empowering, really satisfying, really just almost like it didn't exist. But interestingly after that I think I had nervous exhaustion, didn't I? For about four or five days afterwards. Like having to keep it secret, and then like [child interruption. T: "just a minute [child's name]"]. We had to be briefed about like fire arms officers like you know because that's pretty likely isn't it that we'll bump into people with machine guns saying get down. Um, you know the whole

## Appendix F

the thing of like preparing for conflict when you're going to greet it with pacifism, it's quite...weird really, quite. So yeah I'd say for four, four/five days afterwards I think I did have nervous exhaustion just from, you know...

CL: What, the stress of it?

T: Just from the stress of it. I was nearly sick before we, I was walking through whatever the park was, and it was due to happen at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, at like five to three I thought I was going to be sick, I was so nervous, so so nervous. Yeah, when it was all finished and we'd been let out the cells and got back home here safely I was like [makes tired relief sound] [laughs].

CL: How did you get involved with that did you just hear about it and want to be involved in it?

T: Um, well. Greenpeace train a lot of people to be activists, they do like open training days which anybody can go on, you know if you're interested I'll let you know when the next one is.

CL: Yeah.

T: Um, yeah, so actually you have to do a full day's training in non-violent [interruption] in non-violent direct action [T: "just a minute [child's name]"] and that just covers like concepts of violence [interruption], solutions to conflict, about managing imagery, yeah.

CL: The image you present?

T: The image you present. The photo that's going to be taken. If you're stood on a roof for you know 20 hours and you get your picnic blanket out and start having food what's The Sun going to have as its front page headline "Hippies

## Appendix F

Have Picnic on Top of Parliament”, you can’t have that can you. So you know, so that’s what the day’s training is about, like how that image is to be maintained, marketing almost, you know. So that, that’s like how you get involved as a Greenpeace activist, from there they contact you for a specific action, but it’s still in, like that particular action is still going through court, there’s still like legal proceedings are still involved so I don’t want to go...

CL: No.

T: Because like I could implicate, like I’m sure you’re not, like we were talking about I don’t want to come across like that Climate Camp activist but there’s still, it’s still in court, there’s still people who could be arrested that haven’t been so I don’t want to go massively into the detail of it, but basically someone will contact yer face to face, no phone calls, no emails, then you’ll go to the location and you’ll be briefed on the specific action.

CL: Sounds very organised.

T: Well they’re the largest environmental group in the world.

CL: Yeah, yeah, I suppose [laughs] they would be.

T: Yeah, so.

CL: I was wondering what kind of, I mean I know you’re involved with Toon Climate, you know, are you involved in any other kind of regular activists groups?

T: Um...Newcastle Community Green Festival, which is the largest free environmental festival in the UK, one of the few that’s stayed true to it’s anti-capitalist routes, regularly involved in that kind of the organising. Up until 2008 I

## Appendix F

was regularly involved in Climate Camp, um but after Kingsnorth decided that was that. So, but other than that no not really. Earth First! But that's quite an informal network.

CL: I was just wondering what kind of the effects of being connected to that and being regularly involved in groups you know kind of empowers or kind of energises you, you know...?

T: Um, being attached to groups can be, it depends on the group of people. Um. I think the 2006 – 2007 Climate Camps I found the meetings like frustrating but productive and the actions that come out of them absolutely fantastic...like the Kingsnorth Climate Camp and there onwards I've found the meetings not enjoyable and not productive, and the actions that come out of them not really very good. So, I don't know if that's a good answer to that question really.

CL: Is that because of the politics changing [dog barks] within the camp?

T: I think a mixture of the politics changing and the people changing. Like...the politics has changed far too far for me, um you know I don't think it should be some ultra hard core event that's like a clique or something that, but, you know it should be open to other groups. But the climate camp never really pronounced its anarchist ideology enough. Err...yeah just kind of lost my way with it a bit, just yeah it lost its way and I lost my way with it. So, um, as far as Newcastle climate action goes, Toon Climate Action, whatever it's called, great group, you know and like working with the people that are in it, err. It again goes though peaks and troughs, you know somethin' will come up and people get really behind it, really go for it, to you know long periods of no meetings, you know something will come up and there'll be quite an intense flurry of activity, yeah.

## Appendix F

CL: And do you find kind of living in a low-impact way kind of you know feeds into your actions, you know kind of empowering you I suppose, that you're living the way you want to?

T: Yeah, yeah, definitely, well...like...there's, there's just no point in going to Kingsnorth and saying you know hey this is all dirty and polluting and then going home and emailing all your mates to tell them, when you're using coal fired energy, you know it's, you can't ...like low-impact living must go with direct-action and direct action must go with low-impact living. And err, I know for some people like we were talking about earlier it's like out of your control, like your energy supply, but like so many things aren't out of your control. I think, if you've got direct action operating in a vacuum then it's pointless isn't it, it's just a waste of time, it's like at the most it will cause a bit of economic damage. But then if you've got low-impact living happening in a vacuum, I think equally you know at the most you'll end up with a [inaudible] or something. You know, it just doesn't, neither works out like on their own, they've got to go hand in hand, in a glorious green sunset, to aspire to. So, and yeah low-impact living is definitely empowering because no body's gonna do it for yer...That's a fair comment isn't it, no body's gonna do anything for yer, you've gotta, you know. And that, in a microcosm you're shaping your world how you want it so why not shape the rest of the world how you want it.

CL: And how do you think, what do you think kind of powers your energy for activism, is it your politics, or you know is it emotional, your anger or outrage...?

T: Collective life experience. I think for anybody, like, we all act on our life experiences, and err Romania was a very powerful [dog barks and is told off by others] yeah Romania was a very very powerful life experience. Err. Yeah, so a mixture of politics, which is part of your life experience, you know what you read, what you see, what you [interruption. T: "this is getting taped"]. So yeah I

## Appendix F

think that's what gives us a drive, and the other key thing that gives us a drive, you know if...if marching from A to B worked, genuinely worked, we'd live in a Utopia, without a doubt. You know, if writing to your MP worked we would live in a Utopia. So the political system that exists isn't quick enough for the ecological crisis that we face and is ineffective, and doesn't listen to the voice if many it listens to the voice of the few. So, I think between the two things, the, you know, my, what I've seen of life and the results that I want, and the political system and the results that I want, I just don't think lobbying or voting or anything like that's really gonna work. So, yeah.

CL: At the climate camp in London in Trafalgar Square, someone was talking about how they think you know the way things at Copenhagen went we're going to see more activism you know as a result, do you think that's gonna happen, more direct action?

T: I'd say no, to be honest.

CL: No?

T: Sorry. I think, if you look at like from the heavy days of Newbury, which was where we shone, to like the GM crops being pulled out the fields, again we shone, to the days of like 14, 000 people joining hands around Faslane, we shone. But now if you look at direct action it's really getting curtailed, I think. I'd like to think that Copenhagen would enrage people so much but I think, I don't think there will be rash of direct action, I'm cynical about it really. Um, I think the advent of CRB checks has really changed things, that the people who are like. You know possibly as a student in the sort of 1970s, 1980s and even 1990s it's almost part of the course to go on a protest march or maybe cut the fence at Faslane or something like that, but now that's going to end up on your criminal record's check for your prospective employer, and it doesn't say oh this person was well intentioned and attempted to stop genocide, it says breach of the peace,

## Appendix F

with no mitigation to your employer. So. I'd love it if you know people were so outraged at what happened at Copenhagen but they haven't been outraged for the previous 14 summits either have they?

CL: No I suppose. Do you think it's going to be more likely that people, you know like a rise in people living low-impact lifestyles [inaudible]?

T: Do I think that there's going to be more people living low-impact lifestyles. Well, in the first instance no, I think it's a bit of trendy lifestyle-ism thing. But when we run out of oil, oh yeah, we're all going to be living low-impact lifestyles, just like Cuba. Basically, I mean that's the fact isn't it once we run out of fuel [interruption. T: "go and put your pyjamas on"]. Choice bit of interview material there.

CL: [laughs]. I suppose my final kind of question you know over all of your activism what's been kind of the high points for you, maybe things have gone really well or you've been really inspired and high?

T: Right ok. Well, a few things really. Um...I sometimes go out guerrilla tree planting, just planting trees in places that are going to waste, that's really like, you don't get arrested, you really get to intervene in the fate of the planet, you get to boost the ecology of the world, so, that's, I always really [laughs] enjoy that and I know that's not what a lot of people view as direct action but it actually is [CL: yeah] it's a citizens intervention in ecology. Um, Parliament, just cus it was big and you know it was you know absolutely fantastic standing on top of Parliament, looking over Whitehall and you know Westminster square, that was pretty mad. Um, at the Heathrow Climate Camp we err, well a couple of things really at the Heathrow Climate Camp, that was very emotional, and the way the locals greeted us was just like unbelievable, and err [partner's name] organised, well conceptualised and the rest of us organised, um the lane, one of the lanes that was due to be turned into a runway was just getting used, you know people had just given up on it, it was starting to become a fly tipping area, and

## Appendix F

um the Scottish and Newcastle neighbourhoods went out and we tidied it all up, we tidied the entire thing up with like a van of riot police behind us making sure we didn't do anything, and we took it all off to the recycling bay, and I think for the locals that was a very powerful message of not giving up and respecting your own environment. Um, so there were definitely a couple of pretty high points.

CL: Have there been any kind of low points, you know the opposite?

T: Err...Mainhill was just tragic, the last day was absolutely awful. You know seeing a forest burning in front of your face, pretty bad. Um, the G20, Ian Tomlinson being killed and the violence of the police, that was pretty err pretty bad. And then the night after the G20 I stayed in a squatted social centre called RampART which was raided the following morning by about 400 coppers with armoured vehicles and an embedded ITM crew, that was pretty disempowering to say the least. Um...[partner's name] my partner took part in a blockade of a massive bio-fuels refinery and the police were very violent in their removal of the protestors, to someone that I love, I found that very difficult... But that's life ay, high points and low points all the way through.

CL: Yeah.

**Interview seven**

CL: I can send you a copy of it if you like.

G: That's alright.

CL: so you can kind of approve it.

G: [laughs]

CL: [laughs] yeah so I was just wondering sort of how you first got involved in activist type stuff?

G: Right, I think the very first thing I ever did that wasn't just signing a petition or handing in one of those postcards that people hand out, err for you to send off, was probably the err student rent hike protests they had, in I think that was in my second year, maybe the end of the first year, I think it was the end of the first year yeah, and I went along to that, um so that was, that was the first thing I did that was anything like that, but I wasn't really involved in that.

CL: was it a kind of protest

G: yeah, there were lots of people that ended up outside of [old shire hall] saying that they disapproved of what the university was doing

CL: was it to do with the [college] rents

G: yeah, yeah they were trying to put the rents up for the something like, they were trying to do it by 10% for the seventh consecutive year or something or so

CL: god

## Appendix G

G: there was a bit of a Barney about that. So that was the first thing that I did but I didn't really stick on with that, but then I suppose I got actively involved in things like um arms trade and the environment later on. Um... I'd seen quite a bit of things about um environmental issues and I'd been reading things like Mark Thomas' book he wrote um what's it called...as used on the famous Nelson Mandela, and that had loads of really interesting stuff about the arms trade and that kind of got me into doing bits for that.

CL: So it's kind of through learning about things...

G: Yeah

CL: becoming more politicised I suppose

G: Yeah, yeah as you learn more about the [laughs] the world then you become more cross about the things that aren't right about it.

CL: Yeah, yeah, Ok. So um what kind of drove you to be involved you know was it kind of emotional, was kind of it political?

G: Um, firstly well, initially just the emotional reaction, so for things like the injustice that the arms trade causes, and the impact that we have on the environment, things like that. So those, they're quite emotional reasons for getting involved. Political, um, not quite sure what you mean by that, I've no kind of, it doesn't quite, like party politics doesn't kind of come into anything.

CL: I suppose more kind of the actual issue itself, kind of...

G: Yeah, much more kind of single issue than general things, um yeah.

CL: Ok, um... yeah so would you say kind of that it's your emotions that kind of drive you in activism?

## Appendix G

G: Yeah, yeah,

CL: Is it anger, kind of negative emotions?

G: Um, yes and no, it quite depends, because on the one hand things like the arms...I'm going to split it into two parts, I'm going to split it into arms trade and environment. The arms trade thing is very much anger, very much so because I do not understand how people can do what they do, because of the impacts that it has on other people lives. There are some things which you can argue about and say ok maybe this has positive benefits in some ways or maybe this, maybe this is necessary for these reasons and you can kind of discuss that, but at a, on specific issues and at a deeper level its I'm just really really cross that some people think that its acceptable to behave in a particular way and um... I suppose that's what drives that. But on the environment side um it's quite mixed because on the one hand you're kind of um um ok so you've got large scale polluters who are doing massive ecological damage or kind of steam-rolling across beautiful landscapes and so forth. But on the other hand there's quite a lot of hope for things like new technology err green technology um err and there's a lot of positive atmosphere around the way people *can* live, and that's quite a big driver on that side. So I think I'm going to split it in two and say yes there's, there's, I think there's a lot of anger that motivates me [inaudible] but there's also positive attributes as well. And I think if there weren't positive attributes in some of the things that I do I just probably just sit in my room rocking backwards and forwards [laughs].

CL: Yeah. Have you ever kind of experienced, with your activism, burnout and kind of disillusionment, you know with what's going on?

G: Yeah, um...one of the... the things that I was involved with, with the arms, were local things within the university, so I was err campaigning for the careers fair not to actively invite some arms companies to their careers events, and to try

## Appendix G

and get them to put on a more diverse set of offerings for careers prospects. And...whilst at first that was extraordinarily positive and we got a lot of dialogue with the people involved and it seemed fairly positive, shortly after that it all stopped um and you've got um a lot of the people that were involved kind of left drifted off so the network of people that were interested kind of left. And then there was kind of massive step back by the careers service, so we'd made all this progress and they just stepped back and said actually no we're really not interested in this we're just going to do our own thing. So whilst we thought we'd made some progress and then they stepped back and it's *hugely* disheartening, and they recently had another careers fair where they invited several arms companies that are, that I really really disagree with. And I didn't organise anything for this time round just because I got to the point where I'm wondering, kind of, given that we got close to actually achieving something and then for them just to step back and forget all of that despite the fact that we were still applying pressure is hugely disheartening, and you kind of wonder whether it did actually achieve anything at all. Um...and then things like um with Kingsnorth there was um, EON has postponed its construction of Kingsnorth power station and um, there was a fair amount of celebration about that, but from everything that I've read and talked to it's completely not as a result of activism um and the company is still forging ahead with its plans to do it, it's just not going to build it just yet.

CL: Is it just economic?

G: Yeah, it's purely economic. And that's hugely disheartening because despite the *vast* public um outcry about it just because their such an economic power they can say ok well it's not going to be done just at the minute but we're going to do this in a little while. And that kind of also destroys public interest in the issue because it goes on the back burner for a little while, and all of the kind of awareness raising that any organisation has done about Kingsnorth it just drops out of the public mind so quickly, um...To an extent you feel quite powerless as

## Appendix G

a result of that and that's, that's very disheartening, um, yeah. But I suppose, yeah, I suppose probably the best example of that would be the, would be the careers fair issue, yeah, I got a bit depressed about that.

CL: What kind of affect did it have, did it make you stop doing activism for a while or did it just make you switch to something else?

G: I haven't done anything with that since then, um, I mean I showed an appearance there and showed my face and said hey look this is still not really on, but we didn't, I hadn't organised anything for that and nobody else had either. So I haven't really done anything for that since then, um, err. Mostly I just sat and read about what other people were doing and also tried to catch up on exactly where the current arms trading issues were and um yeah. I didn't really re-focus because I tend to have several things on at once so I think I kind of...I'll probably go back to it.

CL: But I mean it didn't make you disillusioned with activism, I mean or only for a short period?

G: Only for a short period, yeah.

CL: That's good. Um, does activism kind of contribute to your kind of fulfilment or your happiness in anyway, kind of feeling like you're doing something you know important?

G: Yeah, cus if I, if I. There's lots of things that are wrong and if I weren't trying to fix them I'd feel a bit guilty about that, um, it's possibly a bit difficult to explain exactly why but that might appeal to the engineer in me a little bit actually it's kind of [starts talking more loudly and enthusiastically] this is going on and we fix it by doing this, but people don't, and so there's, I don't know I suppose I just want things *to be better* so I wonder is that related? Um...

## Appendix G

CL: One of the things I was asking people at Climate Camp was do they want kind of a happier future as well as kind of a more just future, do you think that's...

G: Definitely. Yeah, um...yeah so things...I suppose there isn't necessarily an overlap between those two because you could have a better future for society as a whole that will result in shorter term *lack* of benefit, changes in life style as a result of trying not to have an impact on the climate is going to...

CL: it's kind of all interconnected

G: Yeah, um...but no the idea is that after, once, the idea is to achieve a better and happier place [laughs], um, yeah.

CL: It's a weird question. I wanted to ask you about Climate Camp, kind of what was your kind of overall kind of experience of that, you know, how did you, you know, how was it for you kind of being there?

G: It was pretty amazing. It was a massive community, um, it was really quite refreshing because you suddenly end up surrounded by a lot of people who are of similar opinions which you aren't always. Um...which has its own issues with ending up with group think and all that kind of jazz but I mean, you know, um. No, it was very stimulating in that there are all sorts of ideas floating around, there are all sorts of different approaches and ways of doing things, um, knowledge exchange, information exchange. Also just the chance to do something differently was quite nice, um. What was the question again?

CL: Um, just about your kind of general experience of it.

G: Um...yeah...it's as, I suppose that networking with like minded people was hugely valuable, um, and it also provided quite a nice focus for climate activists

## Appendix G

and was useful in its, for its own sake because it also provided a kind of public appearance that there is a large number of people that have these specific opinions and want this, err, you know what these, that wish to exert these particular pressures. Um, and...and I think that in it, kind of as a demonstration of itself was quite valuable. Um...but yeah the kind of 'you are not alone' thing is quite, it's quite useful.

CL: Did you find, did you find it quite kind of empowering and energising kind of being there?

G: Mm, yeah, yeah. Although on kind of two sides, very much on sides because there's...there seemed to be this dichotomy between activism where you have kind of pro-bono lawyers that, that kind of work within the system to go and change things and tend to get things done that way. And, um, kind of more *direct* activists that do things in terms of getting out on the streets and shouting about things or you know taking slightly more extreme measures in some cases. And on the one hand it seems that in many cases the kind of, the, working within the system um, lawyers MPs and the like, um seems to be effective in some ways and quite often more so. Um, without that... I don't really fall into either camp because I'm not really willing to go around kind of, um, kind of chaining myself to, to coal trucks, but neither do I have the skill set to go and um stand up in court, challenge unjust laws, or err have the influence to um convince my MP to vote in specific ways. Um, so that's, that's kind of, that's weird, I fall into this kind of gap in the middle um where I have to be content, content with writing letters and attending protests and sometimes I kind of wish I could do something a bit more either side but um. So on one hand it's great because you meet lots of like minded people and you are err you realise there's so much going on you can kind of attach yourself to various bits of campaigns and the like. But on the other hand it kind of made me realise I'm a little bit in this trough between, between the two...

## Appendix G

CL: Do you feel like at either end it's kind of more effective, kind of, than the middle part?

G: Yes, absolutely. Um, if you are a lawyer you can take things to court or you can get judicial reviews, you can get things like that. Things like the Cornerhouse do exactly that within the arms trade. Um, if you do have the time and the willingness to get a criminal record you can dig tunnels under kind of um roads and things, you know close roads and chain yourself to diggers and things and cause obstruction to ecological damage. Um, but um I'm not really willing to do either of those, even though perhaps I would given circumstances were different, um...

CL: Is it kind of the criminal record side that puts you off...

G: That and I don't have a law degree.

CL: Yeah.

G: [laughs] Um, yes, yeah...given that my research is into energy um I wonder to what extent is my research more useful than my acquiring a criminal record, if you see what I mean. That will close off avenues that will allow me to do energy related research, which will have some form of impact on the environment. Um, so that's one side of it, the other side I am an engineer that's my, that's my thing, I can't now, it's not the entirety of my life such that I'm willing to make the change either to go and become a lawyer *or* to go and acquire a criminal record and start doing things like that. So I'm um err because of my life I'm very much in the middle [laughs a little] if that makes sense.

CL: Ok. How would you describe kind of the atmosphere at climate camp, do you think it has a certain atmosphere to it?

## Appendix G

G: Um, how to describe it...

CL: it's a bit of strange question.

G: No, it's ok, um...It was weird because there's this, there's quite a large kind of um contingent of, of um kind of middle class-ish student types that will go on these things, and there's also kind of the older slightly more hardcore environmental protestors, and then there's the, then there's sets of people that agree with the broad agenda but are, are part of a different section. I mean the whole climate camp thing had this capitalism is crisis um err tagline, um which, which kind of applies to the green issue but then you also end up with um the anarchists come along and are aligned with exactly that ethic and will agree with exactly why these are, these are having issues. So you have this interesting situation where you've got kind of um people from the, from the WI and RSPB kind of, who aren't necessarily yet thinking of themselves as anti-capitalists but that will agree with the statement that capitalism is screwing the environment over, *combined with* very anti-establishment um anti-capitalist groups, within that same, within that same...camp. And that was quite interesting, you get to share a lot of um opinions with those people and um. I think some of the, the older climate campers felt a bit miffed that the, because it has always been fairly anti-capitalist, I mean that was its, that was its, part of its whole angle, and I think some of them felt a bit miffed that it had been kind of hijacked by hippy student types [laughs a little]. So there was always that kind of undercurrent [laughs]...

CL: a kind of tension?

G: Yeah but, but...I don't think that that was particularly significant, it didn't seem to, it didn't really cause ruptures or anything, I think it was, the atmosphere was *hugely* welcoming, it was, it was err...it was just a way for people with environmental issues to have that kind of united appearance. And I think that the

## Appendix G

neighbourhoods structure of the camp kind of contributed to that, um because people kind of identified with specific regions, um and even within specific regions there were differences in the way people approached issues and I think the way that fed back into the camp as a whole um...allowed for those differences of approaches to be recognised and dealt with for a general um way of looking at how the climate camp should be doing campaigns, um I've forgotten the beginning of that sentence. Err so that regional structure allowed for differences of opinions and approaches to [I interrupt: "yeah kind of more mixing"] kind of result in, yeah, result in people being able to take this kind of united 'this is what we think needs to happen about the climate' kind of approach, I think that was very valuable.

CL: Has each camp had this sort of similar atmosphere to it?

G: The climate camp in London was the first one that I went to [CL: "oh"] so I can't really comment on Kingsnorth or Heathrow or any of those, um.

CL: No you just sort of come across as a kind of veteran.

G: Ah [laughs]. Well I don't know, mm, maybe that's just because I felt like I fitted right in like the moment I walked through the gate, um...yeah, and I think a lot of people would have, would have felt pretty similar, with that. I think that's changed my perspectives on things as well simply by being there, um but the... other ones I have no idea about I'm afraid.

CL: That's alright. Were there, what were kind of the high points for you at the camp, you know were there any you know really amazing times or something?

G: [laughs] ...there were lots of bits that I enjoyed, I enjoyed um...having a couple of mates come over that would have not otherwise been in the slightest bit interested, um, there were a couple of people from university who happened to

## Appendix G

be in London who would not have been seen *dead* at anything even vaguely green related. For them just to come up to see what was going on and to be able to kind of show them round the camp and explain what was going on, explain what everybody, why everybody was there but without feeling like I was preaching about it. Um, so that was, that was quite nice. It was also kind of taking part in stuff, there was, there's always a lot of talk about living in different ways and things like that um but then actually to be at the camp where we were using quite a lot of these different ways of living, so we've got composting toilets, we've got wind power and solar power on the, on the camp, we've got um mass catering that meant that people could go and do their, their own thing. So we've got different groups facilitating different groups doing other stuff and things like that, and actually to be part of that was hugely positive...Hi

[someone comes in the room]

CL: Oh! Sorry is this, is there something going on in here? ["is the reading group in here?"] no it might be in W205, I think it's usually in there.

G: I've lost my thread, um [CL: "the highs of it?"] yeah, yeah so that was really good um... to the point where I was, I was on the gate because I volunteered for a, for a shift on kind of, on the front gate kind of welcoming people and, and explaining to the occasional drunk the rocked up at kind of five in the morning that err it was, it was a working camp and that there were families asleep in tents and that it wasn't a festival. So kind of things like that followed by having been awake for 36 hours straight just because I happened to be there some guy from the radio coming on and saying 'hey can I ask you about these environment questions?' and you're like 'arrh!' [noise of tired frustration], so that was quite a high point because you're like wow! people are actually, people are interested, it's not always like complete outreach all the time, you don't have to collar everybody on the way back because people are actually interested. Um, so that was quite a high point, and there was stuff, fun stuff like um I'd never done *yoga* before, I'd never done *yoga* before and um following that kind of

## Appendix G

36 hour straight day and security shift and the sheer ridiculousness of some of the things that were going on, so I was absolutely knackered and then there was just this, there was this woman who was calm as anything um took us all to do some yoga first thing in the morning, and completely unrelated to any of the activism at all um I suppose it was part of this kind of way of *living* kind of idea. But, um no it was really good fun [laughs] so there were, it was, I mean there was all the, yeah there was loads of activism stuff but there was also loads of fun stuff as well. Like there was a bike powered smoothy maker, um which was kind of neat, um and I got to geek out massively with a couple of guys with home made wind turbines like oh how did you make those, how did you ride those roaters and stuff like that. Um, so I got to geek out on that, I got to have fun with the, with the bike powered smoothy makers, I got to do some yoga, um and err yeah, um so the mixture of kind of high points of being part of this kind of big group that is involved in environment activist but also because we got to have some fun as well, um.

CL: Yeah. Were there any, kind of low points like feeling really exhausted from everything?

G: ...There was one point where there was a bit of lack of direction, err I tagged along to the um, there was a protest outside Barclay's bank, um protesting their involvement in investment in the Tar-sands, um particularly because we now part own some of them. Err, the, so there was a group that went down to protest outside of there, and on the way back from that there was a large group that decided that it would be a great idea um to sit in the road for one part of it and I got a bit cross with that because they weren't demonstrating anything, they weren't achieving anything, they weren't communicating anything, they were just getting in the way. And the people that they were holding up were public transport and um people coming home with their kids in cars, and I don't I got a bit cross with that because there was no reasoning no thought behind that specific thing and because of the, the completely non-hierarchical nature of these, of

## Appendix G

these events the most you can sit there and say is 'look we're just, we were outside the bank we were making our point, lots of people could see what was going on now you're sitting in the middle of a road in the middle of nowhere blocking public transport where's the, what the, what are you doing' and um...yeah, so there's this kind of completely pointless bit of activity that just ended up pissing people off rather than of being of any particular use I'm...that made me a little bit cross, just because it was completely useless, um. What else, what else was a low point. Oh! Being awake at 4 o'clock in the morning because the police have decided to err shine a *light* into my *tent*, they'd put a massive flood light out by the, the back end of the camp, they were, they've got this community police station that they'd set up which was like a porter cabin and err, across the way, and they'd put this massive flood light on it. And it had been absolutely fine up till, up till err I think it was about day 2 or day 3 or something, and then they switched this flood light on and err that wasn't great. And that kind of pales into insignificance when you think that in previous years they were being battered by the police and they were being kind of kept up at all hours by loud music kind of 5 o'clock in the morning Flight of the Valkyries kind of stuff, um which is ridiculous, um. But that was [inaudible] and it pissed me off a little bit [laughs]. Um, apart from that...no that was it.

CL: Ok. Were there any particular kind of activities at the camp or kind of places in the camp that were kind of particularly empowering or kind of energising for you? Or was it kind of all, all had that effect?

G: Um...for some reason I really enjoyed, oddly enough, the road blockading workshop. There was a workshop on um how you can use your, yourself as a tool for activism, and so you'd got the case where you might need to block a road, err for example you know stopping coal lorries whatever, not something I'm likely to do because I'd get nicked and then charged for obstruction whatever. Um, but the, the workshop itself it...now I know how exactly I can go about doing that and that *weirdly* that was empowering even though it's not a skill I'm ever likely to use, if that makes sense, so...

CL: What just knowing that you could?

G: Yeah, yeah. So you know if it becomes absolutely necessary for me and I can rationalise it then knowing that in the absence of any equipment, any stuff, knowing that there will be people trying to you know take you out of the road, knowing that with enough of you you can actually still blockade a road, just by using some of the techniques they were talking about is, that was quite empowering. Um...there was um...also weirdly being... being an energy researcher made a massive difference because um, the problem with that kind of event is that the, there's lots of workshops and things like that in terms of practical skills but what there's isn't so much of is information, there's information sharing but in very specific forms and not in forms that I'm used to, um so I found myself the only person that was able to talk about the electricity distribution network in *my* region. Um and that was kind of empowering because um you could, you know I wouldn't have the foggiest clue about some of the finer details about how people are doing activism and where they were doing it and what was being effective and what wasn't. You know I go and do things, protest and write letters and the like but um that's not really my, my strong point, but knowing that when people ask 'oh how exactly is this going to work, what can we do to connect these new technologies up that will let us live in greener ways', and kind of having that knowledge was err, knowing, knowing that I had that and could share it that was, that was really good. So, being able to share information was really good, um...what was the question again?

CL: Um [laughs] it's about kind of activities, activities at the camp or spaces which were kind of most energising.

G: There was a specific student workshop which was quite nice, um so, there was a space for on campus activism, with kind of um...just a space to kind of chuck around ideas about what you can do, what different techniques have worked in other places, um who you can talk to, sharing experiences, things like that. That was, that was really good um because that was a group I could, I could go and

## Appendix G

attach myself to that again was in a similar situation, um, so yeah that was, that was really good.

CL: What were kind of the main emotions of the camp for you, you know that you felt while you were there, you know was it quite joyful...

G: Yeah, it was...it was predominately really really *positive* because you came away with lots of feelings about there's all these different things we can do, we've made some wins in some places, we've gone this week and made our point at these various different companies, organisation, places, institutions what have you, we've actually gone and done stuff during this week as well. So that was, that was very very positive. Then there was all the fun stuff that happened as well so it was a mixture of um...it was a mixture of happiness from the fun of it and then kind of taking away positive; we've actually done something a bit useful and we've got these things and now we're quite motivated to go away and do stuff *further*. So that was my two kind of points on it.

CL: And what was your experience of kind of the swoop, was I quite different for you, from the climate camp?

G: Mm, yeah it was it was completely different. Um...the swoop was perhaps a little different for me because I did rather feel the need to not be identified at that event [laughs]. Um the...

CL: Did that kind of hold you back?

G: Oh yeah, massively. Um...that was, that was very frustrating because as a result of my research I couldn't get particularly involved in that, I went along to support and that was quite good although there were a lot of people that were there kind of going 'weey!' you know 'go people trying to shut the power station *down!* But we're not going to do anything about it' [laughs] so that was kind of

## Appendix G

weird, that was really really mixed. Um, you'd also got um there were a couple of um very close knit groups that were trying to get into the plant itself to shut it down and um, had this, they, from how I saw it, this mixture of um...although, though, they were making their own plans for how to, to go about doing this and I think they got frustrated at the other groups that were either not helping or kind of actively not helping because they weren't quite doing what they were expect, they were expecting so, and also because of the...non-hierarchical nature of the group that went *down* there was no kind of coordination of efforts to um maybe take all the police over to one site to allow other groups to get in. So there was, there was, I mean there was a small degree of that but it wasn't always um it wasn't always *productive* if you see what I mean. Um...what else did I find...it was quite disheartening because I...the police using dogs was very very intimidating, *hugely* so, *massively* so. And yes legally we shouldn't have been trying to break into a power station um...it's aggravated trespass you know, they have every right legally to try and stop us, um but as a, as a whole it was a bit disheartening and I think um...I think across the day, it started out very very positively and you got kind of regular updates whether you were talking to people, whether you could, you could get updates on your phone as what exactly what was going on and that was quite good, so having that information then was very very useful. Um, but um not being able to take part was frustrating, um and I think some of the groups involved found it quite frustrating because you've got this kind of weird mix of groups that were willing to do things, groups that weren't willing to actively try and break in, um, and, um. Yeah it was, it was a completely different atmosphere, they were, they were very separate events, the one was very much a kind of um skill sharing, workshoring, networking, information sharing and, also it's location itself as a political statement, in London, but then the, the massive group of people that turned up to, to Ratcliffe to say you know 'we disagree so strongly with what's going on here that we're actively going to try and *stop* this power station'. Um, and, I think the different focuses lent different emotions to the two different days, um...

CL: What were kind of the dominant emotions at the swoop?

## Appendix G

G: ...bit of confusion, never really knew what was going on, um, bit of frustration, a fair amount of intimidation [laughs] um and...a bit of a worry about how exactly it would have been perceived by the wider public [CL: "yeah"] um because...it's, on the one hand it does say look this, there's a, you know we disagree with this so strongly we're going to have a group of people that will try to break in and turn it off, but on the other hand you can also have this um perception of um you know bunch of hippies trying to turn our lights off, and kind of managing how your perceived externally is very very difficult. Um, so I was quite concerned about how that was going to go off err yeah.

CL: Were you kind of disappointed by it all or disillusioned by how it kind of turned out?

G: I didn't think it was going to go the other way [CL: "no"] I wasn't kidding myself, um... I think I'd also um [laughs] I was talking to somebody a bit later, and um I don't know whether this is true or not, but in addition to the massive police presence there and all of the barbed wire and everything I'm led to believe they also had a private security team of somewhere in the region of a hundred Gurkas on the inside [laughs] who were also kind of contracted to provide security as well, um [CL: "were they all kind of hiding or something"] well yeah, I'm not altogether convinced but um yeah. The idea of kind of a private army almost, not literally cus you know but err private security providing that very very strange, um, yeah. No it couldn't have gone any other way, um and I think that possibly should have been made clearer from the start, rather than the yeah we actually gonna, we actually gonna be able to do this, so there should have been a massive press release along the lines of 'we don't stand a chance in *hell* but the fact that we don't *is wrong*' and that kind of putting that kind of across could have been quite useful, I don't know. Um, not really being trained in media relations I wouldn't know how to start doing that but err. I mean it was useful in focusing what people wanted to do and I think for a lot of people it provided a bit of an insight into...people themselves. I certainly found myself reconsidering...to what extent I can take my activism um in terms of direct

## Appendix G

action and civil disobedience and things like that, um. And I think that fairly um securely solidified it as I'm not willing to, to get arrested, um but I think for some people that might be exactly the opposite. Um, and also provided a bit of err comfortable network, err a, a safety net for people to kind of try that out for the first time maybe. Yeah.

CL: Did you find it kind of not as empowering maybe as the climate camp?

G: I don't think it was. I mean there, there were definite high points, I mean seeing a I think she was about eleven or twelve, an eleven or twelve year old on the fence kind of, I can't remember I don't think she had a banner but she might have done, um and that was a, that was quite a symbol to kind of rally around this kind of small child standing up by this massive power station going 'look this is *wrong!*'. And there was an interview that she had with one of the independent media groups there on the day and um, that was that was really interesting to watch later. And that was *hugely* positive and that, that made me feel an awful lot better about the day, um but err yeah.

CL: Were there any other high points for you?

G: ...being involved in ways that weren't actively breaking the law, so there was a point where we were running up and down the side of the power station err and there were several units of police that were literally just chasing us up and down the side of the fence, and we managed to create a bit of a diversion for another group that were willing to *actually* you know have a go at the fence which was quite nice. Um, and, that was, that was a bit of a high because it felt that I was doing something *without* taking that step too far um *for myself*. Um, so that was, that was kind of neat but I...the, the major focus was, was twelve year old girl on the fence kind of as, very very symbolic and I think that, that was very interesting. Um...yeah.

## Appendix G

CL: Do you like to work quite independently with you activism, kind of you know do it all yourself mostly or...

G: No.

CL: No.

G: Um...it feels more constructive if you're doing it with other people, much more so, if you, you can do bits and pieces on your own um but that quickly tires you out, you quickly get responses of things like 'yeah but you're the only one that thinks that' um, and being able to bounce ideas off other people is, is very useful as well, um. I've done a couple of bits and pieces on my own, I've, I've done a couple of one man protests which has been quite interesting. Um, and to extent still got my point across, um before I really found that there was a, an interested group of people, not like a specific group but there were interested people that I could talk to, um particularly with the um careers fair events, um before I got involved in that it still was possible literally just to rock up to the careers fair with a bag full of kind of anti-arms fair propaganda that I'd printed out and just start handing these out to people. And so this kind of, you can actually, you *can* do it yourself, you, you know given, ok dead simple bit of kit a printer you can actually go and do this, you can get information across. And I got a fairly positive response from that, a lot of people go 'wow! Shit we didn't know this!', err the occasional 'yeah so what', but a lot of people go 'wow! Actually this kind of information is, is interesting and we'd like to hear about that', and that was kind of motivating in one sense but you can't do that the whole time um and I think that, that support with other people is, is important.

CL: Does that kind of feedback into your energy, being involved in a group and connected, you know kind of boosting you?

G: Yeah, but it also goes the other way, um quite often you'd think oh would get involved with this and then everyone's got projects on, or they've all got things

## Appendix G

to do, or they're already involved in seven or eight other things um [laughs], and there are only so many, there are only so many fights that you can take on, and I think everybody that I've met feels that and um. To an extent a lot of the time you know that other people kind of agree with you but won't necessarily do anything about it, and, and so it goes both ways, on the one hand it's really great to have that support when you can do things with other people, you can, you can do that. But sometimes, sometimes it's you [laughs].

CL: Well that's, that's the last question.

G: Oh, cool.

CL: Ok, it's a bit longer than it should have been.

**Interview eight**

CL: I'll start this. So I was just going to ask some general questions first; like how you first got involved in activism. You know; what were your first experiences of it?

S: Um. Well I kind of started from the kind of campaigning sort of thing. Like, if we're defining activism as general kind of 'working towards social change' I suppose ["Yeah"] or 'improvement in the world in some way'. Um like at my high school there was a teacher who was very involved like in social justice sort of things, and we ran a People and Planet group and an Amnesty group, and we did like campaigns in our school, and petition signing, and assemblies, and art displays, and this sort of thing, and campaign to get rid of the nasty evil Coca-Cola vending machine and replace it with a Fairtrade one. And I suppose that, like also my, I've, just from my parents, like I know my mum used to go on CND marches when she was kind of younger, has always been quite I don't know... *righteous* [laughs] not in that way but like morally generally, so I've always looked at the world as a place that there is right and there is wrong in and you have to kind of work to, so there's always been in my, like in my field of vision I have to... gestures don't come across on in the recording do they [laughs]

CL: no unfortunately [laughs]. I'll write down 'gestures'.

S: [laughs] you could draw me. Um yeah, I suppose it's always been something that I've thought of being, something that you're kind of meant to do...

CL: Did they sort of inspire you; your parents, teachers?

S: Yeah they sort of inspired me and sort of kind of showed me how to do it, like I think they're responsible for it occurring to me that like that it just kind of seems natural to some extent, that you have to kind of be a good citizen and socially involved and politically aware and that sort of thing, it kind of, mainly

## Appendix H

from studying um like philosophy and ethics and that kind of, I don't know, it's almost like it seems to me like an imperative to, you can't just be the product of your society you need to shape it as well ["yeah"] because I think like they made me aware of the injustices that there are in the world. And I first got into campaigning through like Fairtrade issues and human rights issues, and it's such a human thing and like if you believe in the value of a human being for whatever reason ["yeah"] then it's just an imperative to expect other people to be treated that same way that I'd like to be treated, and to kind of fight for that when we I don't know, I feel like we live in a very advantaged situation like and our country also doesn't always, I don't know I feel a responsibility towards making sure everything our country does or like the products I buy and any influence I can have can't have those negative effects which I'm benefiting from because we're a developed country.

CL: Yeah. What do you think drives you more, is it more kind of political or ethical or emotional, that kind of drives you to be active?

S: I don't know if you can separate like political and ethical ["or is it kind of all of them"] like I suppose it comes from an ethic and I suppose the ethic might come to some extent from like an emotional response and to some extent from a, like it's a combination of my emotional response 'oh that's horrible people shouldn't like...', a kind of emotional desire for fairness and justice and a kind of rationalisation of that desire; that like I've been, I've had a quite nice life, I've not really needed things, there's a lot of people in the world who are quite disadvantaged and that's partly the fact that I have this nice comfortable life is kind of built on the fact that a lot of people don't have it almost. And, and from that I kind of get my ethics so that I kind of feel this is right and this is wrong, and that kind of then feeds into the political I suppose, could draw a nice picture [laughs]. Like, I don't know, because, I don't know I feel like the morality then needs me to *need* to be politically aware because that is the way we kind of *rule* our world, and that's the *framework* we use, so that's how you have to, that's at

## Appendix H

least at the moment, the way of having an influence is through the political, aspects of things. Is that, does that count as an answer?

CL: Yes that counts.

S: [laughs]

CL: How do you kind of sustain your energy for activism? Is it kind of, does it not need sustaining, does it ever kind of dip or...?

S: Um, well I suppose at the moment I don't have that, I don't. It's sustained by the fact that I kind of see it as being morally, as a kind of imperative, that you have to like, there's Alice Walker she says something like activism is my *rent* for life on earth and I kind of see it as that; you have to pay back what you get out of it or you have to like, it's just very important to me that my life has a positive or at least neutral effect on the world, and I always feel like activism the way I do that so it's, it's something I have to do but at the same time I don't always have the time, I don't always have the like energy and. I suppose my ideal would be living in a way that um *always is* activism, like living in an eco-village or something like the Kew ecovillage, living in a very sustainable way and like also being like an activist through like political campaigning sort of things, but also through my lifestyle. And so, I don't know, I try and always do the lifestyle things like the freeganism that we do, and not driving, and trying to make my life personally as sustainable as possible, but I don't always have the energy for campaigning and that sort of thing especially when you feel like it's not going very well. But I suppose being part of a group that's active and so you know it will meet once a week and there's always going to be something going on, a group of other people who are always *wanting* to do action gives you the kind motivation to keep going, and like there's always someone to carry you with the energy when one person's not feeling so energetic ["yeah"], um which is important. Also I suppose reading and staying aware, as people like, because of my interests I happen to

## Appendix H

make friends who have similar interests and so like at the moment for example I've got a friend staying over who asks me questions and always wants to talk about it and I think that's really great, and that keeps me feeling alive and awake and thinking about it. It's easy to kind of slip off your radar if you don't have that I think.

CL: Yeah. Um, have you ever kind of experienced burnout in activism or disillusionment?

S: Mmm. I don't know like, I always see burnout as something that happens to like proper hardcore activists, I'm not sure that I'd call myself a proper hardcore activist.

CL: I think it can happen at every kind of level.

S: Ok. I think ["not that..."] burnout to the extent that you stop doing anything or...?

CL: Um, just the, I suppose almost like your motivation to do it has sort of vanished.

S: Mmm...I think often when like at the end of doing a campaign and you kind of get to the point where it's like has this actually made any difference, what's was the point, like...what was the other half of that question 'have I ever experienced burnout and...?'

CL: and kind of I suppose disillusionment, which can make you feel burnt out.

S: Yeah! Like I suppose, like arr, I don't know like when you get to the end of doing something, like um when the [students union] were doing an Arms fair, an arms fair? Nooo. [laughs] They were doing a careers fair. And like we were

## Appendix H

trying to engage with C, the careers advisory service and get them to think about doing other things. Just like lots of actions that you do it's very hard to see tangible results from them, and you can never know how much affect it has had because you can't rewind and not do it and then see what happens then, and can be long term and it can be quite subtle, and it I don't know. So it's often quite disheartening, and like doing work with students, if like you've done things where you're standing outside the library and trying to talk to them about, like just before The Wave we got people to sign a petition for climate change, and that was actually really positive because a lot of people, it was such an easy thing to do, like, I don't. But then you talk to some people and you try and have a conversation with them, that's kind of the point, and it would feel like you weren't like neither of you were getting anywhere, so that's really I don't know, often quite disheartening um...so I don't know if that's full burnout I suppose its like there's a scale of being burnout and not being burnout and I vary within to how much I feel like my actions could have an effect. Um but I suppose you have say to yourself we're all just one person so you just do what you *can* [yeah] not measure it by how much effect it has, you just do what you can do

CL: Do you feel kind of your activism contributes to your fulfilment or kind of happiness?

S: Um, yeah I suppose so, like I don't think I'd, I don't know I can't imagine me being someone who wasn't... I don't think I could take it away from who I was, so like...I suppose I could, I could feel like I was living a good life through doing other things like being a social worker and living a sustainable personal life without being an activist I suppose, I think there are lots of ways of having an impact on the world, um...so its not like necessary that I'm an activist to find fulfilment I suppose, depending on how you define activism, but I don't think I could not think about my life in a kind of political social justice sort of way, and then I suppose that leads to always evaluating whether or not I'm doing it, therefore if I feel like I'm doing it *well* then its fulfilling, and if I'm not then that's where you burnout [laughs].

## Appendix H

CL: I just wanted to ask you about climate camp and your experiences there [yeah] you know how would you describe your overall kind of experience of the camp?

S: Like what I thought about it, or how it affected me?

CL: what kind of affect it had on you being there.

S: I found it really inspiring I think, it was the first thing I'd done like that that was like being around lots of people who were quite seriously, serious activists. Um, you'd ask people their jobs and they'd be like I'm on a government funded activism which kind of meant they were on the dole and that's what they did with their whole lives um [laughs]. And I think it, like seeing that people *could* live in a way where like their activism and their was *the* central thing, and they didn't have jobs because they were, they thought it was so much more important to be activists in which ever way. And also just living...like it changed how I thought about how, like I think you can be, it's quite easy to like go to school, go to uni, get a job, and live in very conventional way and not kind of question it that much. And I found like we *took a space* and we lived in a really sustainable way and everyone that was like, it wasn't like representative of democracy, there was democracy, it had its problems, um but it was...I don't know I feel like *we* together all achieved something quite impressive just in how we were living for that week. It was, it kind of made me think, like I remember lying in my tent at night [laughs at bit] thinking like um that I was just thinking about what I *should* be doing, and like what was my kind of, instead I decided to, I don't know if I have done or not, about what I *can* do, and always just kind of look at it in a slightly different way. That it might be more helpful to be inspired to do things. Um...I think also just being aware that there's that kind of community out there when you're not always surrounded by it, but like at the climate camp it made me know that there was these hundreds of people who felt the same, and then we're all going off to our bits of the country but we also exist, its quite heartening to

## Appendix H

know that you're not alone and that sort of thing. But yeah, I know I learnt a lot just from going to the workshops, and learning how to build a toilet [laughs a little], and stuff just like very practically as well.

CL: For you what was the kind of most I suppose *empowering* or kind of energising of the spaces or the activities at the camp?

S: Um...[C: you know were there particular ones?] I remember we went and did some, we went to a fruit and veg market one day, someone had a van and we just went, um and like just asked all the shop holders for if they had any thing they were throwing away and got loads and loads of vegetables and fruit for the camp and that was so much fun. And it was like so beneficial, like it just made everyone feel cheerful because we had like bananas and you could walk along and be like [does a high voice] "do you want a kiwi? Do you want a kiwi?" and it was great and it's so different to what happens normally where everything's about like "do I want to buy a kiwi" "please buy a kiwi off me" "get me rich" sort of thing, like it was really nice um and like we met one of the stall holders he wasn't even throwing his vegetables away but we told him what we were doing and he just gave us loads of vegetables, and we were like it's all just about being kind. And it just really challenged, like you always say it's quite depressing that everyone's always about making money and it was really nice to see just like to make a small step and people came to reach you where you were like doing that. Um, what, repeat the question sorry.

CL: Just if there was any particular spaces or activities at the camp that were kind of really empowering [yeah] or energising

S: There was also um I think the way the, I found it really interesting, and at the protest as well after the camp just like the way we interacted with the police and the kind of the kind of I suppose it was reasonably small amounts of kind of rebellion and there was like bargaining with the police it was just really

## Appendix H

empowering to kind of I think it's made me now like be less worried about following the rules and doing what the police expect of you all the time and that sort of thing. Um and found that empowering, and I also went to a workshop which was like it was about drama and activism and it was just, it really, I think it really kind of...it was a room full of like vague props and musical instruments and things hanging off the ceiling, it was a really strange space, and they started off the workshop with the people who were running it, there was like five people, and not that many people came, they just kind of walked around the room and did like improvised strange drama stuff like making noises and picking up things and if it was like prose or a recipe or whatever just like reading it in a strange way and interacting with each other, and they gradually pulled us in. And there was no telling you what to do, you just kind of followed and made it up and created it yourself, and it was just, especially because I'd been on gate duty all night and then done yoga and then did this [starts to laugh] like after not sleeping all night, but it was just like such a *different* way of working and then, then when they gave us they said like try and, we made a little short play about, um I can't remember, it was about like...permaculture I think, and like just how we interacted as a group after having done in it that way we just all did things and saw how it worked and we didn't talk about it, and I remember someone who joined late started trying to discuss it and we're like "what are you doing" whereas like that's what we'd have done naturally in another situation. But I don't know it was just, I don't know just I think a lot of things in the camp just kind of challenged how you thought about things, in lots of different ways, and I found that really helpful and really like I don't know like I learnt a lot from it [laughs].

CL: What was kind of the atmosphere like at the camp, you know how did you feel it was?

S: Um, it was strange because there were *different* atmospheres, like I think there was an amount of like a kind of angry atmosphere like um the anarchist group

## Appendix H

that were there and there was like people who were had specific, who were there because there's so many problems and wanted to do something about it. And there was mixture of like, a kind of celebratory empowerment but also anger at the corporations and really like *charged* thinking about like, at like corporations or whatever that we were doing going doing actions against, or about towards the police. But then there was also a really celebratory, lots of having a good time, music, and in the evenings when you weren't doing your workshops or you're protesting. Um [coughs] and it was, I don't know, it was strange, it was different when it was like being set up and set down it was like "we're all in it..." I don't know, I can't remember if I can describe the atmosphere or not, but like during the kind of actual camp when it was like people could come in during the day and see what was going on I felt like it was *quite* different and more like... I don't know what the difference was, but like when it was like public access and not public access it felt a little bit different, like it was very much a kind of "we're all in this together" in the evenings when it wasn't public access, when it was more like slightly more *formal* somehow, still I don't know... It felt like when people came to the workshops, there were people who were staying at the camp and people who were just visiting, and the people who were staying at the camp all seemed to have the same perspective that were a little bit more removed from normal way of thinking compared to the people who were just visiting. And there was almost like a slight amount of antagonist, like a kind of, I remember feeling myself when we were doing something really different and amazing and it was like you want to shake people and be like "No! Think a little bit differently!" which wasn't really fair. Um, it was a generally, I don't know, kind of positive but passionate atmosphere, I don't know how to summarise it really. It was funny and that sort thing which I think really helps, I'm quite a, I get really excited when I feel like things are happening so for me it just made me really cheerful and excited, but also I think there's an amount of kind of anger or just upsetness at the world as well [yeah] so it's a strange one.

CL: Ur, were there any, what were the kind of high points for you? Kind of the best bits?

S: apart from the things I've already talked about or?

CL: Yeah you can just say "those things" or

S: Um, I liked, not in terms of specific moments, but just really satisfying, I loved making the toilets! That sounds really strange [laughs] um and like doing things like on the last day me and another girl, with all the kiwis that we'd skipped we made a *massive crumble*, and everyone was like deep like tating down, like fixing the camp and putting everything away, and we made this big crumble for everyone like a 500 well maybe 200 peoples worth of kiwi crumble and it was really amazing to kind of, I don't know, I really like taking that kind of supporting role almost of making the camp work, and like I like the communal aspect, the kind of communal feeling of we're making toilets for everyone and other people are making food for me and we're all supporting each other, and I really liked that. Um...it's interesting the things I've said has been about, I suppose they're the things that stick with you more than the specific things I learnt in the workshops. Um...just like silly moments that happened as well, because it was a nice different space you'd end up doing handstands and juggling by the front gate, or we'd like randomly put on a play after one of our workshops [coughs] or like I served food one day with everyone and they were all, instead of like talking to the people who were queuing up for food we all *sang* for the whole time we were doing it, and it was really *bizarre* things like that that were really nice, I don't know.

CL: Were there any low points?

S: Mm...[like maybe being exhausted from kind of it all] I'm trying to remember how [laughs a little], I remember my sister came and visited and I was just too tired to talk to her and I just kind of *sat*. And also, I suppose like I didn't know that many people there and so it was a bit like, sometimes if you were tired like I didn't, like obviously it was just a transient thing that lasted for a week, but I

## Appendix H

didn't feel necessarily that at home, um...and...I don't know, how, like it was quite exhausting because you were up late and going things during the day like going off to London and protesting or whatever, and it was...tiring, but I think *in general* like the camp itself for a week was a very positive inspiring thing, like yeah it did get you tired and it was a bit like, I don't know, just exhausted at some points, but generally it was good...for that week at least [laughs a little].

CL: Just kind of talking about the swoop as well, what was kind of your overall experience of that?

S: Um, like the swoop as in taking Climate Camp?

CL: Err The *Great* Climate Swoop, kind of the contrast between Climate Camp and...

S: As in Ratcliffe?

CL: Yeah

S: Ok [laughs] because they, when we, they called it the swoop when we swept, because they didn't know where the location of Climate Camp [C: yeah] was going to be and they took *that* that was the Swoop as well [C: yeah]. [inaudible]...I don't know, what was my impression of the swoop did you say?

CL: Yeah kind of your experience of it, maybe in contrast to the Camp or...

S: Er, if, I don't know, it was really, err...like there was an amount of similarity, I'd don't know if it's because I'd met the people that I knew from climate camp, like there was a kind of, I should have thought about this more I came so I could tell you better [C: no no, it's good if it's improvised] [laughs] um...I think I'm quite a...a not that hard core-y activist, like I never know where I stand in terms

of like I don't *really* want to be arrested and I don't know how much I want to harm peoples property although I kind of, like if they're pretty *evil* I suppose it's not that bad but I probably don't want to be arrested for it so I'm too much like, I'm very happy to help other people but I wouldn't want to do it myself and. I suppose I felt, I don't know the swoop was had a weird, it started off, it was always very, there were always bits of it that were really positive and really exciting um, and like lots of people in fancy dress and running around and like not quite doing what the police told us to do but not enough to get into trouble and that sort of thing. Um, it was because it was like there were lots of different groups doing different amounts of protest and it was, you didn't really know what was going on, whether the other groups were like, like by the end of the day it was quite like "what are we meant to be doing?" it doesn't work like that there's not someone telling you what you're meant to be doing, but it was I don't know...it wasn't. I think mass action's very difficult, you almost like it can almost work, well I think that it achieves different things to if you have like five or six really dedicated really thought out planned people [yeah] who can go in and press a button and turn it off and run away again, or like what the people did with the *train* and [yeah] chuck all the coal off it and that sort of thing. Like it wasn't effective in that we didn't turn off the power station but we showed, I don't know also I always think it's really sad about that sort of thing when the thing that gets covered *are* the small amounts of violence, um, which was kind of the focus, *although* I think the media coverage was much more sympathetic and friendly than it would have been a few years ago, which I thinks really positive [yeah]. Um, but it felt, it, it felt, it was a really positive thing to a large extent but it felt a bit kind of chaotic and dispirit and by the end of the day it wasn't really, didn't feel that kind of centralised, not that, I don't know...um...and what was it, I'm trying to compare it to the climate camp and I can't really work out how. It was, it was harder to like, the climate camp felt very positive because like, there was a kind of media round up each day and you kind of found out how you were doing, there were different articles. Something that was really incredible at the swoop actually was that they like, you signed up by text, did you do that as well?

## Appendix H

[yeah] and then you got like the text that you got were like really, they did *give* you the sense of community that you wouldn't have otherwise because it told you, because we were all spread out around the site you kind of found out what other people were doing and the progress they'd made, like some people got onto the coal heap, and some people broke through the fence, but you didn't see it but you knew that was going on so it was like you were part of something bigger in the same way that at climate camp there was lots going on [yeah]. Um...I don't know, I think the swoop was quite difficult like there's a lot of people and you have to make like decisions and that sort of thing, it was quite hard to like all get 300 people together to decide what to do and something where you have to decide just really really quickly and that sort of thing [coughs] like...[do you want some water?] maybe yeah [laughs] um...so yeah, I don't know if I've run out of things to say on the swoop or not.

CL: Was there anything kind of empowering about it or energy boosting?

S: There was like. Arr! It was I remember um...*feeling* a little bit more empowered by the time, I don't know if it was a result of climate camp or just like err talking myself into being a bit more braver, but like there was a time when we were standing on the bank by the big fence and there was some people who'd climbed over the fence [oh yeah] and um the police decided to clear us out and were kind of like in a line advancing on us, and I was like, I don't know, like I was quite happy to kind of walk away *very very* slowly and then like talk to the police about what they were doing with it, and I remember like them all being given water at the end and asking for a bottle of water from the police guy and him giving it to me, and the kind of...yeah actually I suppose that's what was, going back to the earlier question like [yeah] I think often protests its really sad that they become about like the right to protest, it becomes about the conflict with the police rather than about the issue [yeah], it's just really sad and really frustrating because why is it like, the police are meant to allow you to protest and [yeah] like somehow by being an activist you're always the baddy, which is *ridiculous*! People don't become activists because they want to get rich! Or

## Appendix H

they want to benefit personally! It's because they're trying to help *the world*, so surely that's what the police should be doing too, but. Um, there was the kind of feeling that this, is against the police which is kind of, I really don't like, but it's kind of, I don't know, what happens at a protest. But then having learnt a little bit more about that, being less intimidated by the police as a result of climate camp, I was able to just get in the police's way a little bit and I found, I somehow found that quite empowering. But like realising that I made that step I suppose. Um...what else, what, was there anything I found empowering or?

CL: Um, yeah doing the swoop, but um...

S: Yeah, the texts were really good and, like I said before, they were really helpful too, and like hearing about it on the radio on the way home, and that sort of thing.

CL: Was the atmosphere very different to the climate camp?

S: Sometimes it felt quite similar to climate camp, like and I think there was an attempt to make it like the climate camp atmosphere, um. But then sometimes it, just because it was, I think just because climate camp was like a base and the swoop was...people splurging onto a site, um. And like you weren't living there, like some people camped but it wasn't, I don't know, there wasn't communal living [laughs] which is what the camp was, it was a protest and so they're going to be different in a lot of ways. Um...I don't think it was massively different [no]...just slightly [laughs].

CL: Were there any sort of high points for you at the swoop?

S: At the swoop, um...I don't know what was a particular high point, like I kind of see it as an event as a whole. Like there were little, like it was nice like seeing all the people there, and like there were people that I knew that I wasn't

## Appendix H

expecting to be *there*, and like just the feeling part of something quite big, and it was quite exciting, and I suppose...like the beginning of the day where it was like “what’s going to happen?” and it was just like exciting seeing all the people arrive and everyone’s cool posters, and like the march up to the gates lots of music and that sort of thing, it was really nice, and yeah.

CL: Were there any low points, like maybe with the dogs?

S: [laughs] I don’t know whether to count the dogs as a low point or, like it was really, it was really rubbish that the police got the dogs out and there was a bit, were you there? [yeah] when we walked in front of a car really slowly? Because there were some people trying to go and break down the fence, though I think they were just distracting the police from some of the *other people* trying to break down the fence. But like we walked really slowly in front of the car and the police just um...the policeman got out the car and was like arr “if you don’t move I’ll just get the dogs out” and I was like *Ooh!* [laughs] you probably can’t get your dog to bite someone for just walking slowly down the road. And just the general like feeling of like, because it was, because there was a point when someone lost his phone and I went and asked the police if they’d found his phone, it was just like being Joe Public and the police were there to help you, but then they’d suddenly switch and see you as being this *enemy* person and it was just really horrible, um... um, and there was also the kind of like, the kind of the *curve through* doing an action – that you kind of start off really optimistic and excited about it and get “oh I don’t really know if it’s having an effect”, and I think by the end of the day there was that kind of... “how useful has it been?”, “have we achieved anything?”, like sort of. I suppose you just run out of energy, like it’s really exciting and you have a lot of adrenaline and then you run out of food and water and you’re like “oh let’s do home” [laughs].

CL: What was kind of the overall emotions of the swoop?

## Appendix H

S: ...um...it felt exciting looking back on it, and...I suppose like generally positive but there was an amount of mixedness about like, I don't know, there's just always questions about how it went, and how it could have gone better, and were we doing the right thing, like is that the right way of effecting change. Is that an answer?

CL: Yeah, yeah!

S: [laughs]

CL: I was just wondering, with um kind of regular involvement, you know like meetings and that sort of thing, activist meetings, does that kind of help your energy going, kind of feed into it?

S: Yeah, um, I've been going to regular meetings *less* this year than I have done previous, just because I'm really busy with other things [yeah] um but I would say like having friends involved in different places doing things does keep me really involved. And I think in the past, I think it's a mixture because I'm always kind of asking "what's the *best* way to have an impact?" like...like is it through the very aggressive direct action stuff or is through kind of gradual slow campaigning. I do think you need all of those things [yeah] but it's also like what's the best thing for *me* to do. And so [breaths out heavily] there can be an amount of, like I think keeping you focused and maybe like feeling that you have people around you who want the same thing, like going to a group, that's really important. But I've also found it quite frustrating sometimes in the past and I think that's probably *the reason* I'm not going at the moment, it's just because [breaths out heavily] it doesn't always feel like you're as effective as you can be, and that maybe you shouldn't worry about that, but then I don't know it can get annoying and...I kind of, I think I told myself by not going to a group I could, I kind of hoped I'd be able to do action by myself almost [yeah] like [name] who

## Appendix H

you also interviewed is very good at, like I'd always seen him as very good at like kind of *not* being in a group but still doing things and having an effect. And I'd always, because I'd like got involved in activism through the *groups* that were at school it always just seemed obvious to me to do it as part of a group. Now kind of I'm hoping to learn how to do it by myself because I think, like trying to work with a group you often lose a lot of time deciding on what you should do and what's the best way of doing it, and I think it's almost more important to be like "I'm gonna do this!" and if anyone, like tell lots of people about it and they can do it with you if they want to, but I think it's almost more important to decide what needs doing for yourself, and yeah it's supportive if people want to do it, [inaudible] if they want to do it with you, but I'm not sure if it's, I don't know. You lose things as well as gain things from doing it, from working in a group.

CL: And does your kind of freeganism, that kind of lifestyle, does that kind of give you more energy for activism, kind of knowing that you're doing that as well?

S: Um, I suppose it kind of helps in like identifying myself as an activist, because I'm always, like that is very, something that if I don't go to groups and I'm not doing any campaigning, and like I always know. Like it's important to me that my lifestyle is um not having a negative effect on the world. And it also like, I don't know, like people love talking about it to you as soon as you tell people, and people are really interested in it, so from just doing *that* it kind of, I think it changes how *other people* see you and therefore changes how you see yourself. But like because it's a positive thing which I'm very happy I do, and I can explain to people in positive terms, and people are generally. I don't know, it's really nice having to talk about it a lot, and people tend to find it reasonably, like if not inspiring at least interesting, and tend to generally think it's a good idea, maybe that's just because I pick who I tell about it, um [yeah]. But that, I don't know, is a good way, because I think one of the important things to do as an

## Appendix H

activist or as whatever is to kind of discuss things and make other people think about them, and that's kind of the point of doing all your actions to a large extent, is like changing public opinion. So it's nice to be able to do that in a low-impact this is my lifestyle sort of way, as well as doing it on a like with lots of people making a political point sort of way. And it does like, like it can be exciting if you get good food or life if, don't quote me but if you like [laughs] well, just like if you have to, like sometimes you have to take the padlock off the gate to get through it, just a little bit exciting and keeps you kind of feeling *vaguely subversive* [yeah] and it kind of keeps you *feeling* like an activist I suppose. Yeah it is really helpful I think.

CL: Well that's the last question.

S: Cool.

CL: Sorry it was a bit longer than it should have been.

**Interview nine**

P: Ok, so...

C: Do you want to go first?

Y: Can I get some general questions, the boring ones first?

P: Yeah.

Y: Um, obviously you're male.

P: Yep.

Y: And your age?

P: 38

Y: And you're married.

P: Yes.

Y: And you have three...

P: Three kids yeah...[name] who's twenty, he lives in Swansea now, that's [name] [child shouts in background] Yeah? [child shouts reply] Ok not to worry. Um and then [name] ten, in the background, and then [name] seven, in the background.

Y: ok, and what was your, before you um came to Lammas what was your profession?

## Appendix I

P: Well that might be a simple question but [laughs] it's not a simple answer...[Y: "I know, the last time I asked that I ended up with a 20 minute answer!" We both laugh]

I mean directly before coming to Lammas [yeah] I worked as a carpenter in Swansea on the Gower, is the kind of *pocket* answer.

Y: Yeah but you have been trained as an architect.

P: If you go right back then yeah I trained, I went to university, I trained as an architect, after three years I got my degree, I *left* the profession, I got completely disillusioned with architecture as a profession, *dropped out* so to speak, went to live in Tipi Valley for five years where I learnt basic land survival skills, and so it's fascinating because it's a completely alternative society [Y: mm] in Tipi Valley. After five years having grown a little bit...wanting a bit more structure, wanting to see people work together in a more structured way, I went and lived in a farming community on [place] called Brithdir Mawr [Y: yeah] um [Y: with [name of low-impact activist]] [same name] is part of the community yeah, then I went through some kind of... [Y: Sorry just um didn't other people from here have been living there] that's correct, [names of other residents] lived there for a spell [Y: oh right] sometime back, I think they were only there for a couple of years, yeah [Y: and I though [another resident's name] had been living on the Gower] [same name] lived on the Gower, yeah, and he did live in a chalet community called Owen's Field, yeah, but is that low-impact? Yeah I guess it probably is in the scheme of things, it's off the grid, little timber shacks [Y: good, thank you very much for that] there we are.

CL: Shall I do a question? [all laugh] I wanted to ask about, just going back a bit, but when you were doing the planning application, so I'm interested in kind of people's energy in relation to their activism [P: yeah] and like when you were doing that it was like really drawn out, having to keep to doing it, was that quite draining at the time sort of energy wise, did you feel quite low...

## Appendix I

P: *Yes*, I mean at times it was you know absolutely very demoralising, and there were times when I kind of, I don't think I was ever one my own but I just felt quite kind of isolated, plodding on, plodding on, you know just having these *ridiculous* conversations with the planners, just trawling through these heaps and heaps of paperwork. I mean there was a *point* when it really kind of...I mean *really* got to me. In the spring of 2009 I had two hernias *and* a burst appendix in a short space of time [Y: what, sorry, what's a...] a hernia is where your gut burst through [Y: oh!] your muscle wall [Y: oh yeah! yeah!] and a burst appendix is when your appendix, when that bursts down here [Y: oh my god] yeah so I was, and that was undoubtedly due to stress because that's where I carry my stress if you like. Um...so yeah it was, it was really hard, but I guess one of the things that I'm, that I've always been good at is endurance in a way, I mean when I was at school I was a long distance runner, I'm quite good at finding that inner rhythm and just you know and work step at a time, keeping on going, keeping on going, one step at a time, keeping on, you know I can work in that way, it was that ability to put my head down and just keep plodding that got me through in a way

C: Was it kind of the sort of vision of it, you know getting the...

P: Well it was a whole combination of things, it was partly the vision, which for me is so so crucial, and also the role or the responsibility in finding myself in a position to be able to run with this. Um I don't know for whatever reason I had the skills and the passion and the right kind of circumstances whereby it kind of landed on my lap, you know and I felt quite privileged to be running with it. But there were *massive* affirmations along the way, in particular there were single events and sequences of events that were just *so* affirming. I remember at one point there was a guy, who was on our kind of *inner* team, dropped out there was a big hullabaloo he dropped out, he held the whole legal team together and we were left without any legal representation so we thought oh shit what are we going to do, then the next week a solicitor emailed [name of another resident]

## Appendix I

and said hey I'm a solicitor I really want to help you with what you're doing. And that's just one example, there's been countless examples just the, you know, just the kind of...[Y: inaudible] yeah I could see that it was *striking chords*, with other people, and also there were king of events, like how we came to purchase the land, and there were affirmations along the way that were really important in me being able to sustain that running power and it's got to be said [wife's name] played quite a big part in that in that she was in a position, we were in a family position whereby she was bringing in quite a lot of money and so the response, my kind of family responsibilities, you know we talked about it and she was happy to run with those for a while and that was a big part in me being able to put my all into it because it was more or less full time for a good few years, through that planning situation, does that answer your question? [C: yeah]

Y: So, from the policy is kind of meant to be process and why, what made this whole thing so stressful?

P: It's a cultural thing, I know the policy refers to a process but that was just hollow words by, well it wasn't hollow words, it was good intentions by a forward planner who subsequently left the local authority, um you know it was made with good intentions as a policy but the actual reality of dealing with local government which is massively influenced by local politics um and has a culture that is kind of embedded in maintaining the status quo, just a whole combination of things, just a sec [interruption, child comes over to show him something] sorry about that, so did that answer...

Y: So you felt encouraged by people around you who *weren't* planners, did you feel encouraged by *planners* at any time?

P: No [laughs] no the opposite, um no the planning system itself was *horrendous*, it's a horrendous thing to deal with because it's so *cold* and so uncommunicative and unresponsive, and it aggravates the situation, for example there was no doubt

## Appendix I

in my mind that the nature of the planning system fuelled dissent in the local people here, many of them even said as much to me because when [cat makes noise] when faced with a decision well ok I could either just be quiet and let this carry on and get loads of stuff from my neighbours or I could join in with my neighbours and write some letters and then this new threat this new thing might go away, so it polarises local people into a yes or a no situation, it creates a kind of planning fight and it's the legal way that if you polarise a situation you argue it out and you work out who wins. So the planning situation, not only was it absolutely demoralising to talk to the planners and to deal with the planning situation itself but it made the local situation much worse. So the kind of *encouragement* came from what we did with the organisation and from the support, I mean we had local support as well that was absolutely vital, that was where that came from, and from our own kind of conviction really...

Y: So...I would like to go one step back [P: yeah] and um explore this reason that made you start Lammas in the first place [P: yeah] and kept you going if you have been turned down twice right?

P: We were turned down twice but it was a lot more complex than that, we were repeatedly blocked at every turn and Pembrokeshire county council planning authority, whether intentionally or not, kept on messing up the process and slowing down the process [C: like not getting back to you?] not just not getting back to us, loosing critical papers, forgetting to ask for critical papers and therefore invalidating the application, um squabbling with the planning inspector about what method has to be used and therefore starting the planning process again, you know just continuous you know. From a cynical perspective it would be misusing the rules to block and obstruct at every possible turn, whereas from a you know on the other side of it we were perhaps just unfortunate in that we had a *whole catalogue* of bureaucratic local government process errors that slowed what *should have been* at *most* a twelve month process down and drew it out over the best part of three years [Y: yeah] so...

## Appendix I

Y: What were you expecting, what was your reason, what was the...

P: So coming back to the to the vision...I mean for me it's my career, in a sense, you asked what I did before Lammas well in many ways, perhaps this answers Charlotte's question a bit to a degree, in that what gave me the conviction and drive to continue, in that many ways Lammas was the culmination of my *career* as such in that I studied architecture the bit of architecture that interested me was the *human* architecture side of things, how the built environment affects *our behaviour* and environmental architecture, I left that and I went to live in Tipi Valley and I was particularly fascinated in societies structures and I learnt how to live in a low-impact way, embedded myself in a completely alternative *culture*. And it's important to understand that Tipi Valley is a *completely* alternative culture, it has its own language, its own traditions, [Y: inaudible] well it has its own dialect there are phrases and terms for example that relate to the local geography that for a stranger coming in are bewildering, terms of reference, because you know [laughs] Tipi Valley started in the sixties by just you know hippies coming and settling there and it's [Y: going back to the land?] yes, um...and having *imbedded* myself in that way of life and then gone to a kind of structured community um...I knew what was possible, I knew that there were ways, lots of different ways, of living on the land, farming, creating lifestyle and livelihood that that you know had *massive* potential for replication across the country, created far higher quality of life, really good for biodiversity, and you know could *potentially* compete with farmers in terms of productivity. You know, so there were all these, you know I was completely converted that you know there's something in here, and then I found myself in a situation whereby...I had *created* the perfect lifestyle for myself, I had built myself a round house in the woods, I worked with horses and made hedges for a living, um I grew, in the community we grew all our own *food*, had our own dairy scene, baked all our own *bread*, very very self sufficient, um and I used to go shopping by horse, I hardly ever went in the car, I'd been without electricity for about 10 years by then [Y: wow!] I didn't mind that at all [Y: that is low-

## Appendix I

impact!] well *it is* low-impact and I was *still* creating plastic rubbish and that's an important point because there is no escaping, there is no, there is always compromise [Y: yeah] because *even* in that situation you know if I for the provisions that I bought created waste, I still relied on fossil fuels to go see my family, there is always compromise. And that element of compromise is important because that was my interaction with the rest of society, what I found was I was *increasingly isolated*, I was living in a *different financial frame* [Y: yeah] and *different time frame* to most to more and more and more of society to the point where I was just some complete *wacko* medieval peasant living in the woods on his own and I thought what's the point to this? At that point I went through some kind of emotional breakdown epiphany or whatever that *threw* me *right back* into mainstream society, oh sorry you've got this plane [Y: plane yeah] shall I stop for a minute [Y: yeah, it's just very very interesting what you're saying at the moment so I really don't want to lose it] [all laugh] well I'll pause while this plane [Y: sorry to stop you there, you can't escape the planes you know] [all laugh] No no you can't, you can't live as an island [Y: no yeah, I think it's not good to live as an island maybe] No and I wasn't completely alone there was a culture there supporting me but it was fairly minimal [Y: So you felt very much on the edge of society?] Oh! Yeah, I mean I was used to living on the fringes of society, I mean Tipi Valley is on the fringes of society, we were *outlaws* there, you know that was our *status* we were you know, we had police helicopters flying over filming us now and then, you know police raids for the marijuana, um you know we would go into town you know smelling of wood smoke, completely outlaws. So I was used to living on the fringes of society but I, for whatever reason I went through this...having *created* my perfect life in the woods at Brithdir, you know with the round house, you know working with horses on the land, growing a lot of food on the land, um very productive, fantastically efficient scene in terms of um self sufficiency, went *through* this epiphany, *thrown* right back into mainstream society I found myself, got together with *my wife* and I suddenly found myself living in mainstream society in a rented house in Swansea working as a painter decorator carpenter with um three

## Appendix I

children [Y: Wow!] Well yeah it was, you know it was as radical a shift as that, and *my question*, and I guess *the question* that bought that about or the question that I asked of the universe is how can I be of service, in a way, you know I just, having *created* you perfect life what do you do next, having *created* your perfect life as I did and you're living it in the middle of the woods in Pembrokeshire with nobody really knowing that you're there and you feel that you've kind of, I don't know, insight into an alternative way of life what do you do with it. And so having, asking my set of questions, this question still when I'm in the middle of Swansea painting and decorating and just listening listening listening for a long time just I don't know how can I *help* you [Y: to people you knew or to...] No just to myself just to my god or to the universe, you know, self reflective questions [Y: yeah yeah] um...recognising humanity's plight, particularly when you've lived a kind of lightly on the earth in a very direct way, you know I was used to collecting my own water and processing my own waste, and then going back into mainstream society just seeing the *utter madness* of and the *utter consumption* of the kind of of these *beautiful resources*, always aware of that in the background - how can I be of service – and that is when Lammas as an idea landed on my lap, and it was partly that kind of, so for me it's my career in a way because having studied all these kind of alternative society structures, having been in the alternative world of west Wales all of my adult life um and always been passionate about sustainability, and *seeking human patterns* and *seeking solutions*, I felt in a position to run with this [Y: So the hippie grown up?]. No I don't think it's the hippie grown up, because that's too simple, in many ways I think the hippies have always been grown up, you know without the hippies there would be no wind turbines, there would be no solar panels, um without hippies there would be *no* sustainable development, the hippies have all you know since the sixties, and probably even the fifties before that, have always you know played a *really* important valuable role in society, although somewhat marginalised [Y: in that they were dreaming?] In that they were visionary in that they could see what was what was going on, I remember when I first went to Tipi Valley in the um early nineties you know all the people there could see, what is

## Appendix I

only being recognised now by international politicians, that the society's systems were based on consumption and therefore not sustainable, we knew that years and years ago, I mean people have been saying it people, people have been aware of it for donkey's years [Y: yeah, is that frustrating when you aware of something and your friends are aware of it and you still see it happen out there] yeah. And so not hippie grown up but I found myself in a position whereby you know I found myself...kind of with an opportunity to push the boundaries of the alternative culture, and also to mix them with mainstream culture, I guess that's what I'm trying to do is to bring those two cultures together. Tipi Valley does not talk to mainstream society, it's not interested in, it has an active policy of not engaging with the media, not engaging with the council or with authorities that was how it was when I was there, we physically threw out any media people who turned up and any council people who turned up [Y: you just wanted to be left alone?] Well it was because what we were doing was considered so radical our approach was - look we're better off doing it quietly if we make a *noise* about this then we're going to cause trouble for ourselves, if we *just keep it quiet* in this little valley they'll just leave us alone - and it *worked* and they *did* leave us alone, partly because we were so numerous and we had so much land and we were so determined. And so there have been lessons all the way along that have helped me kind of helped me be where I am now, you know I come from a culture where I've experienced that if people are determined, if a small group of people are *clear* and *determined* nothing will stop them, no police, no government, can stop them, actually if they're clear in their vision and committed and just run with it. And I guess that conviction helped too.

[interruption]

P: Sorry

Y: No problem

## Appendix I

C: Yeah so it's kind of a lot of input now for kind little or not so much input later on

P: *Yes*, Yes, and there's also you know you've also got to be patient because we are turning a very degraded environment and building it into a very rich environment, and that, that growth naturally takes time. You know we're going from overgrazed sheep pasture with you know *hardly* any biomass at all, you know, to *forest gardening* largely. You know, so there's a time delay in that. So you...and I...so you know, I know it's a lot of work, this five year period, you know, is really tough, it will really test the families. Um...and in a *way, that is*, if I've got a concern about society it's around, it's *that*. In that I know how much energy and time and money and resources it takes to put in sustainable infrastructure, and actually time is *so short* for mainstream society, there is so little time left. If, for example, you wanted to convert you know ten per cent of the countryside into this sort of thing actually you should be starting *now*, you know, it's no good starting five years time because there's a time *delay*, and an energy *delay*. And as resources become more and more scarce, and the price goes, it becomes more and more difficult. You know, at the moment society is still functioning relatively normally, or what we consider normally, I can ring up and get a JCB on site and get it digging a small quarry or I can get trees delivered, relatively easily, nails delivered, relatively easily. There will come a *point* in society's decline where these things will become increasingly difficult, so...that's my concern about society's transition, we are leaving, we're not, it's not the eleventh hour, we're living on borrowed time as it is. And, you know, as a society we are not moving quick enough to avoid *substantial* climate upheaval. And, you know that's how it is [laughs a little].

Y: In your motivation to create Lammas what role does climate change play?

P: Well climate change is a very interesting one, um...I think

Y: because you were drawn I think, we talked about biodiversity loss, how this

## Appendix I

has been very degraded, the resource problem; that we're running out of fossil fuels, other finite resources, but what role does climate change play? For you?

P: for me? At the moment climate change plays a very minor role, um and for me the issue is. See all climate change is, to my mind, is an indicator of our misuse of our environment, it's just a knock on result of our abuse. At the moment it's relatively mild and relatively minor, a case of... *it will come*, it's already *coming*, and that will, it will get much much worse, it will accelerate our problems and challenges as a species. What the project, or what it revolves around for me is resource use, which is the heart of the matter, resource use and consumption. Resource use: metal, timber, fish, food, *land* is the key one, *land*. So that's what the project revolves around, it's about...taking people out of than town's back to the key resource; land, and letting them, empowering them to connect with the key resource land, and meet their needs directly. Because that's how you build relationship and understanding. You don't *really* understand about electricity until you're in a situation where you're fiddling around with a 12 volt battery and a solar panel trying to get your laptop to work, *that's* when you start to appreciate about electricity. You don't *really* start to appreciate water until you're fiddling around with bits of hose and a spring or a well. You don't really *appreciate* grey water or sewage until you're dealing with it yourself. That is the human condition. *And* on the flip side of that it's to my mind such an important part of *life*, such an important part of nourishing your spirit that ["being on the land you mean?"] *being* on the land and *relating* to the earth through those interactions because that is how we relate to the earth, and in modern society all those things are *taken away* from you. But that is how we relate to the earth because those are the things that the earth provides; food, water... [sound of fabric ripping] oops that's my chair breaking, last chair [Y: oh no!] that's all right I'll grab a temporary thing [Y: do you want to just sit down here?] I'll grab a log...

Interview ten

CL: Ok right. So you don't have to answer anything you don't want to.

W: Ok

CL: We can just skip over it, and just like you can give like as little an answer or as long an answer as you like, it's up to you. Ok, so I was just going to ask general questions first, like kind of when and why did you first get involved in activism, type things?

W: ...activism generally?

CL: Yeah generally.

W: um

CL: Is that too broad?

W: No, no, it's a great question. Um, I think, I think the first thing was probably when I went to Newcastle University and I met people who had been involved with Earth First! [yeah]. So this is err Newcastle err 1992, um, probably um [coughs] a guy called Nick who had actually been one of the founding members of Earth First! In the UK, and been involved in one the *first actions* somewhere further south, but he went to Newcastle University as well um. And I was already into um nature comes first and anti-capitalist stuff but that hadn't *evolved* into how do you turn that into action or. So, yeah, he was quite inspiring in terms of um...I suppose in raising my awareness about the Earth First! approach, um which is about activism and non-violent direct action in particular. Um and encouraging me to get involved with that. So I was very involved with Earth First! and the road protest scene, until about 1996 and then I got a bit *fed up with*

## Appendix J

the road protest scene because I felt it was too...too antagonistic [yeah], it was too much them and us. And I moved sideways into what I think probably you would call community activism. So same environmental objectives just trying to find a different way of doing it. So that involved starting community gardens and working within my local setting of Newcastle and Newcastle only really. Um so that was kind of between 96 and err 2000 I suppose, um and then I got, I was aware of permaculture at this time, I was doing some permaculture, but then I took permaculture training and I also took training in facilitation as well. So I went sideways again more just into permaculture design and into community development work. So it still for me was a form of *activism* but was quite different again, a lot more getting down to the community level of things I suppose...And then [coughs], yep, and then I suppose the other big change was transition coming along really so, which I found out about quite early *because* I was involved in the permaculture movement already, and it seemed to make sense to me, to be the next step beyond permaculture *for your home*, or your neighbourhood, a transition being permaculture for your town or city or you know community generally so. But you know that's been an evolution, it's not a real change of direction...

CL: Do you find, do you think that's more effective – the community type activism to antagonistic type activism [um], or are they just different?

W: No I think they're just different, and I think you've got to use methods that you, that work for you and that you think are most appropriate for you. But what I've always tried to hold to is that you've got to have a lot of respect for everybody else's methods, whether that be some kind of weird radical socialism of some sorts like the kind of living Marxist kind of newspaper people. *Or* the people still involved in non-violent direct action, Earth First! still exists and the various off shoots of that still exist. I don't do any of that *at all* any more, *but* I think it still has a place. Um I mean yesterday students getting very upset and angry in London you know. I don't think they'll actually change very much, in

## Appendix J

that particular incidences, but people have changed an awful lot in the *past* through getting angry on the streets and rioting and or more constructive non-violent direct action. So, you know, equal rights you know votes for women, all these things have come about through, through that non-violent direct action, so. I have a lot of respect for it, but, it's just not something I chose to do at the moment. Most likely that's because...I've got a family, I've got a bit of land, and so I'm settled. And you know whereas in the days of non-violent direct action you would get a phone call to say "oh yeah come down to the protest in London, it's happening tomorrow" and you'd go "yeah! Excellent! I haven't got any responsibilities, I can got to that, it's brilliant!" you know and you do it. But I have day-to-day responsibilities now so taking time out just to do the community activism that I do in the *evenings* um is a stretch on my time as it is, yeah, so.

CL: [sigh] oh you've already answered another question, so what was you're kind of motivation for activism...

W: Do you wanna ask me that question anyway because you never know.

CL: Oh! I was just saying I was going to ask what kind of activism you used to be involved in.

W: Oh, ok, I've answered that, yeah.

CL: So kind of has your motivation changed or has it always been, do you have the same motivation for activism?

W: I think my vision, the long term vision has always been the same, um you know a more cooperative society, less capitalism maybe non at all if we could work that out, keeping the oil in the ground, um you know not burning fossil fuels, not, you know, not using cars, trying to have you know localised economy, localised food, you know localised transport systems. That, you know, I've

## Appendix J

always, I've had that vision for a *long* time, I think it must have been since... I was 15 or so, so a good 20 years ago...and...you know how, how I've tried to *implement* or *contribute* to that vision has changed over the years, you know. So the transition strategy is the one I'm involved in now, but you know, the same issues were being talked about in the road protest movement and, and especially at the Reclaim the Streets movement which came in you know alongside that and after it. Um you know, you could pick up a leaflet about Reclaim the Streets and it would all be about you know, climate change, *and* how we're burning oil, *and* you know how nobody's using renewable energy, *and* how food is not localised, *and* how we *destroyed* our local social fabric because of the car *and* the roads, *and* how all that's supported by the capitalist system. It was the same you know, it was the same problems identified, and that it goes back to the 60s doesn't it, the 50s [yeah] it's not. Um yeah...Did that answer your question?

CL: Yeah! Yeah so I was just wondering what, do you have a kind of particular *source* of your energy for activism, is there kind of a particular sort of place it comes from...[W: That's a great question] with you I suppose.

W: [coughs] um...yeah I'm not too sure about that really [yeah it's quite difficult to know] um...I mean I think partly it is that vision, about how the world could be, and how pockets of the world are already. You know there's ecovillage projects out there that already are zero carbon, there's communities out there that have low car use and lots of bicycles instead you know, lots of local food, there are places out there that have got those bits so I *know* it can exist. So one of those motivations must be hope. I think another major motivation must be just simply love for the planet as well and um turning, it's turning the anger and horror that I see, at the destruction of the planet into love and hope, turning that into a positive project. Which is really the change that occurs in activism from when you're kind of young and angry do the non-violent direct action, or in some cases violent direct action as well, some people do go down that line, I never did. You know, there is that's, there is just pure anger against the horror that you see, you know and. So yeah I don't think that energy *lasts* you know so to maintain my

## Appendix J

activist approach I had to switch over to a positive way of dealing with it. So permaculture provided an *awful* lot of that for me.

CL: Do you feel kind of *compelled* to do something, like you can't *not* do something you have to be do something towards that vision?

W: Yeah, yeah to some degree [yeah] um I have been through a bit of a phase where I thought that um...that maybe, you know and I think this applies to a lot of activists, that they take it up on their shoulders that they're the only one that can basically you know um what was it that pop band popular in the 1980s and 90s had this song called gonna gonna get the girl, kill the badies, and save the entire planet. There was something about that song that kind of rang true for I think a lot of activists in the 90s and...you know it was almost like you were taking it upon yourself to solve *all* of the world's problems, and that's just absurd. So I remember having to slap myself round the face at some point in the nineties and just say I must get out of that attitude. And I, and I saw it in other people around me, and then I realised maybe that's in me so you think actually I've got to get rid of that – it's not my responsibility to save the planet and be a green person or anything like that, it's just my responsibility to do a *little bit* and to share with other people the *little bit* that I do. You know, and humbling, it's humbling toning it down a bit and being a bit, being less um...being less certain about it really I suppose. I don't see any right or wrong in the world, I don't really see good and evil and black and white in that kind of way. And actually [coughs] I don't think I ever really did at all even in my road protest times – I can remember having arguments with other road protestors where they saw it as *evil* and black and white [yeah] and some people do good and some people do evil, and just like what the fuck have you been watching too much *Star Wars* or something [I laugh] and it's just ridiculous you know [yeah]. I'll go sideways a little bit because there's a story which's relevant to that which was at the M11 road protest there were some protestors there that were having a *massive go*, you know almost starting a fight with some security guards there, and I was just like

## Appendix J

“what are you doing?” “Why are you doing this?” They were just like shouting at them saying “well they’re the enemy just you know, they’re working for the dark side” [I laugh] which is just like what are you talking about! You know. These were guys who basically were illegal they were illegal immigrants and they’d been *arm twisted into* being security guards for the roads, because they didn’t have any choice, it’s just like right you are going to be a security guard for £2.20 an hour, totally and utterly as *little* as we can get away with paying you, you’ll be there for 24 hours a day, you’ll *sleep there* on the site, you know, we’ll give you nothing else what so ever um, or we’ll send you home, you know. And you couldn’t help but feel complete *pity* for them, you know it’s just, these aren’t the people doing wrong there’s somebody higher up who’s a bit *twisted* in the head clearly but anyway, what was the question again? [Oh] [I laugh] I went sideways a bit there.

CL: um, oh the energy of activism, kind of where it comes from

W: oh right, ok...yeah there is something there though in that Star Wars thing though which is about you know the force, as Star Wars calls it you know, but for me I do believe in the spirit, I do believe, I don’t, I’m not Christian, I don’t do the god thing but I do believe there’s an energy behind, behind us you know, I’ve got some pagan influences in me so I do see it more in a kind of folk myth legend way of gods and goddesses and energies and spirits and stuff in there. And, yeah, that, um, yeah that does guide me to some degree. I don’t, maybe less so these days, but yeah every now and then I do ask for help on that, or I will sit and mediate on a particular problem and I’ll ask for guidance on it, you know. And that for me is, is, you know, is a way of communicating with that spirit really, and that does give me an *enormous* amount of energy, and...it’s a, yeah, I feel like I’m directly tapping into, into the Earth really at times [coughs] and you know, um, it might just kind of be my weird interpretation of stuff in my head but every now and then the Earth is clearly pissed off with the way people are treating it, you know [yeah]...

## Appendix J

CL: Shall we do the next question. I wondered if you've ever experienced burnout in your activism, or kind of thought about dropping out?

W: um, not with the transition stuff at all, I feel like a really experienced activist now, and I know when to say no, and I know what my limitations are, and I get really pissed off with people who you think are going to say yes to everything [yeah] burn...*but* certainly in the road protest times there was, the burnout was a common phrase, and people would get burnout from that, yeah there was a friend who just stopped and moved to Ireland and did something completely different you know. And so people went mentally insane from it [yeah] as well, I do remember one person getting sectioned because they'd just lost it basically, other people coming down with ME through exhaustion and just using too much of their vital energy, and not having, to my mind, a source of energy to replace that, or not knowing when to stop or when to just kind of go actually I'm going to sleep. And for me that was a physical manifestation of that "I'm going to get the girl, and kill the badies, and save the entire planet" "I'm going to do all on my own" "I'm the only one who can do it", "I'm gonna..." it's just rubbish, you know. Um, for me that [coughs], and I was maybe quite lucky about this when I learnt, partly through permaculture, partly through facilitation, is really learning about community participation and community engagement, and learning about how it's really important to develop groups where everyone's encouraged to get involved *and at their level*, and do what they wanna do and not having anybody dominating stuff too much, you know. Um, and in theory nobody should get burnt out at all, and I feel an *enormous* sense of um *patience* now, almost to the point where *I don't care* whether something like transition succeeds or not, um which sounds *awful* um...

CL: Is that because it's a sort of experiment?

W: Not so much that it's an experiment, it's just I'm doing what I can do [yep] and if as a society we *fail* in terms of climate change then it's the whole of

## Appendix J

society's *fault* and I'm not going to, I can't blame any individual for that, but I can at least kind of say that I contributed in *someway*, but maybe I'd be damaging myself if I was to say that I didn't do enough [yeah] cus I feel like I do do enough. And for me part of that sustainability is that I sustain my energy and I help to sustain an organisation or help to sustain a group in the long term which means that [coughs] that the solutions need to be *slow* and *steady* and not *quick* and you know, um...It's the difference between, I kind of like parallels when I'm talking about groups, it's a bit like a group being just a candle and you light the candle and you can stuff it out quite easily, or it's like chucking paraffin on to a fire that's not quite ready yet, you know I much prefer to think about an organisation as say like as a fire you start off with little twigs, you start off with bits newspaper, you start off really slowly, and it's ages and ages before you shove those big logs on you know [yeah] which are like the big projects you know or the organisational structure, what ever it is you know, so...does that answer your question?

CL: Yeah! Yeah, it kind of leads onto the next one because I wanted to ask about how you sustain you energy, if there's any techniques you use that you find help.

W: Yeah, you should talk to [name of another activist] about that one [yeah] [laughs]. Um...it is assertiveness, it is the ability to say no to people, um...it is the ability to recognise your limitations, um and know who am I responsible to and what am I capable of doing, um...and yeah every now and again there's a deadline and you work a bit harder um, but I make sure I have a rest, you know and um. That social and personal sustainability is really important you know, you know if I don't look after myself to some degree then I'm useless to supporting the community around me...So yeah um the last week and a half, you know personally, I've had quite a bad cold, I'm only really just getting over it now and it's um, I've had to take quite a bit of time out just you know *refusing*, despite some pressures from some people, you know just kind of saying I'm not going to go to the garden I'm just going to stay in indoors actually, I'll get up and do the

## Appendix J

washing up at some point and that's it, I'm just going to look after myself and have a steam inhalation, and actually that's *really important* otherwise I'm gonna make myself worse, And, something about letting go of the um *manicness* that I think can get hold of activists [yeah] but um... I think does nothing to help an organisation as well, does nothing to help a group. My worst experience ever of being involved with a group was really the very first one I was involved with it was setting up a community garden in the west end of Newcastle, and I could see something was clearly wrong when I would go to a meeting and would have a little go round of like what has everyone been up to then: "have you done this?" "Have you done that?" And nobody, it seemed like to me nobody had done anything else *at all* and then I would say "Oh, well I've done this, this, this, this, this, this, this, and this" and then you'd feel embarrassed about that and then you'd wonder why are you even bothering coming a meeting then if you're not doing something, so there was *anger* there about that...um. That was just a bizarre phrase, there was a moment of burnout there because it felt like, it was a combination of my inexperience as a community activist, this was like 1996, 97, and also a lot of things stacked up against us, and little tiny errors leading to larger errors, we were really good at getting funding, we got lottery money and all sorts of things you know. We just, you know we employed somebody you know for six months and after about two weeks they became *mentally ill* [I laugh] and it's like oh my god I'm a new employer here I don't know how to deal with this, you know and there was nobody there, well there was some support but not enough you know. An awful lot of things can go wrong with a community project and so, yeah...err...

CL: So how do you kind of balance all the demands on kind of your energy, because it seems like you do you take a lot on, and I just wondered how you manage that?

W: yeah it does feel a bit overwhelming at times, but [coughs] what I realised recently is it's not, I don't feel actually that much responsibility it's *more* about

## Appendix J

possibilities, I get overwhelmed by possibilities these days which is a *bit weird*. Um...it's actually quite easy for me to do, um you know to kind of segregate my time really so you 9 to 5 really is for [name of their small holding] it's for the garden and the vegetable box scheme I run, and if I do any transition stuff within that time then it's an *exception* you know like it might be the odd email or the odd phone call but then general ground rule is that I shouldn't be doing transition stuff within that time, and so my only time I can allocate really to transition stuff is evenings so that might be like dealing with some emails in the evening or having a conversation with somebody or going to a meeting or showing a film like tonight so um. So that puts quite a clear [yeah] boundary on it, um...

CL: Do you find that you do things to help you recharge, if you over drained or, is it kind of taking time out to yourself?

W: yeah I don't really have time to myself really because of [or time to your family] yeah it's more time to the family really, and I'm quite clear about time to the family as well it's generally like weekends, and things don't, generally speaking, other things aren't allowed to eat into my weekends whether it be work or transition, there's obviously the odd thing comes up, you know [coughs]...say the question again.

CL: oh, kind of ways you recharge, you know if you need to.

W: yeah so [it might just kind of happen naturally] yeah I do actually find transition quite um, quite *energising* though, I don't find it a drain on my energy at all, it's like I get a chance to you know get out for an evening and for me that's quite fun so...um, a lot of the garden work I do is also actually very energising , you know [coughs] just, sorry, you know it's a lot of physical work but it's actually quite nice physical work and I'm out in the fresh air an awful lot and um, because I'm part of a co-op I'm very self directed with my work so I don't um, I don't have a constant day-to-day thing of being told what to do and how to

## Appendix J

do it. And think for the average person in their normal nine to five job that is very very draining on somebody's energy, they're constantly having to fight emotionally mentally physically against something they wanna do, whereas for me to, so it's not really a case of recharging my batteries, it's like making sure that whatever I'm doing fits in with my energy *pattern* for that point in time so. Um by doing that, it's quite hard to describe, but by doing that I find that energising.

CL: Sounds quite liberating, working for yourself.

W: yeah, yeah. I've been self employed since I left university, in fact I was self employed before university as well so um. Err [coughs] although self-employment's not quite the same as where I am *now* because we're part of a co-op so [yeah] I've grown in confidence as to what I should and shouldn't do, and what I want to do at out land, and we're maybe a bit of a unique position as a co-op in setting targets for ourselves that are based on what we set to ourselves and not to each other. You probably can work in another co-op and be really, well in fact I know some people who do work in co-ops who are really peed off because um, because you get um people doing jobs they don't want to do [yeah] within that so...um. Yeah and when I was self-employed a lot of that was private garden work so you'd be working *for* somebody else really in *their* garden doing really what *they* want to do, in times, in my times that I set but that was, that drained my energy every now and again, I just say I don't want to be, I don't want to be pruning so and so's, Mrs So and so's hedge anymore just, you know, so...

CL: I'm going to ask some transition questions [alright] so just what made you want to sort of start a transition group?

W: Err, it felt like a natural extension of my permaculture work already so um I, back in the late nineties had already done a permaculture *course* and early 2000 trained to be a permaculture *teacher*, and so I was already very involved in

## Appendix J

permaculture *design* and do that on our bit of land that we'd bought as part of our co-op, and wanting to *extend* that into the community and society around me. And I think Rob Hopkins stumbled across something absolutely genius really which to me was a way of getting permaculture out to a bigger audience by changing its name, to me it's a re-branding and a re-marketing of permaculture in a different way. And taking to another level, it's like suddenly going out to another layer of an onion type thing. And you know permaculture's got its constraints and limitations in being very practical at a household or garden kind of small community level, but how do you apply that to a whole town or city. Somehow the transition model way of thinking, which is really just slightly more thinking than permaculture it just felt very liberating to me in the sense of like "great!" "Opportunity to take permaculture everywhere", you know. So that began for me when I saw Rob Hopkins give a talk about Cuba and the Cuban experience and the power of community film, which was at the Big Green Gathering which I think must have been 2006, and the summer of 2006 [so quite recent] yeah and then the Totnes Transition movement started that year so it was at a stage where Rob Hopkins had just moved to Totnes and was just thinking about it really, and was clearly very aware of Peak Oil and was trying to work out what do we do about this, and had had some experience of Kinsale earlier that year, of trying to develop the Energy Descent Action Plan. So yeah he presented that to the permaculture area at the Big Green Gathering, it must have been 2006, I'd like to look that up actually, be good to work out exactly when that was for your notes um. And so...so it just felt totally natural to me to kind of go right well I'll get involved in Transition and take this Peak Oil concept to the North East you know, because the big green gathering was down south, Somerset or something. Um, I was quite clear that I didn't want to be involved with something at a local community though at that stage um I just wanted to have a general of raising awareness of Peak Oil and the Transition idea generally across the whole of the North East so um really for the next year, year and a half must have been about till the end of 2007, 2008 even. Um I just spent a lot of time organising film showings, the power of the community one, and going round,

## Appendix J

here in [name of place] but also [other place names] yeah and organised, with some local people I knew already mainly through the permaculture network, cus the North East permaculture network already existed at that point, um and organised film showings and then said to people if you want to start a transition group in your locality then here we are, just do it, you know, and so people *did*. So I think [place names] were the *first* really, yeah, sorry I probably said...

CL: And that was through your influence?

W: Um, yeah! I think that would be fair to say really, yeah I mean it's kind of just taking Rob Hopkins message and you know delivering that at the local level really, which I felt quite confident to do straight away because um, because I already knew about climate change, been involved with that a long time, I already had a, I already had a North East network established through the permaculture stuff, you know, and some local activists already keen to help organise things at a local level, you know so, um. And I think on the third film showing suddenly there was you know three people from [name of place] said we're gonna start a transition group in [same place name] and I was like "Yeah!!!" excellent, you know...it was great, I didn't, I think for the first year and a half I was not really fussed about starting a [place name] transition because I felt, I mean it did kind of exist, we had a little mailing list there was like 20 people or so, mainly from like film showings we did, but nobody else seemed to be willing to kind of say yeah lets sit down and have a meeting and discuss this until, well you know it happened at some point, but there was a danger that I'd have one of those meetings when I did everything [yeah] and everyone else was just there kind of just listening, you know. And I deliberately wanted to wait until I felt like there was *at least* three or four other activists would turn up and for someone to actually say right yeah I'm going to take minutes or yeah I'll start that, you know, start that group, or I'll run that stall. Whenever it was, I can't remember what the first few things that happened were really, you might have even been there I don't know.

CL: Was there not enough interest at first?

## Appendix J

W: I think an awful lot of the mailing list interest here in [place name] was students, university students, which was inevitably quite fickle and a bit transient [I laugh] you know, um...so, the first two years I had quite a lot of support from the um sustainable living officer? Which was [name] in the first year and then [name of another student] in the next year, and they were really good at providing kind of some admin support and some organisational support in the next film showing, you know, but not *really*, not really support with developing a group or developing a project, that's kind of come later. But for me that was all part of starting a little fire [yeah] using tiny little twigs and not wanting to put the giant log on straight away.

CL: Do you feel like it's kind of built up naturally?

W: Yeah, yeah! And that for me is very sustainable and very, quite energising by that, and also it's part of the permaculture approach, it's like the tortoise basically, use small and slow solutions, don't rush things you know, um, yeah.

CL: Um. Ok, what do you think the role of meetings is in transition, do you think they play an important role in kind, I suppose the energy of the group? And being together, and moving along, does that make sense?

W: Just like our hub meetings you mean?

CL: Yeah, and other group meetings?

W: Yeah, um. I mean nowadays I think a lot of the hub meetings are very practical, in the sense of organising something, or they are about individuals sharing an idea or information with each other and then getting some feedback on that, or seeking some support of some sorts. And then there's so more detailed technical, there's team meetings outside of that, like the local food website team, which are very nitty gritty, you know they're very much like "oh shall we do you

## Appendix J

know this technical bit here or that technical bit, or shall we fill in this grant application or shall we use that word or this word” it gets very detailed so yeah. I feel like the hub meeting is at a lot more of the philosophical end and the kind of strategy feely end, and then there’s you know team meetings you know where it’s very hands on and very practical. Like some of the fruit group meetings can be very, you know, just checking out the Google map and adding information to it yeah.

CL: So do they serve a practical purpose as well as a kind of keeping the group together...keeping them going, does that make sense?

W: Yeah, I think it’s very important that people meet face to face, is that what you’re after [yeah because I suppose there’s a lot online] there’s a awful lot of online communication which I think is *really* really handy because people find it very difficult to actually get together and have a meeting, and anyway in which we can have a discussion and make a decision online via email, and Google groups is amazing for that...um you know, I mean recently in the website team I had to ask everybody was it ok to add somebody else to *the team*, that I think in the old days I would have to have *had* a meeting with everybody and introduce that person to the *whole* team [yeah] and that would have been really awkward. Whereas in fact, because everyone might have just done “well, who are you?”, whereas in fact via email what was possible was that particular person who’s wanted to contribute to the local food website and has written some articles, so whilst that guy was outside of the group I was able to send the articles to everybody within the team and say “what do you reckon, this guy wants to join our team, he’s written these articles” you know and then I’d get some feedback and comments about those articles, send them back to him person and say look well we’ve got some comments and feedback to you, this is what our kind of views about it, you know they’re good but you know, you know do you wanna join the group, and he’s going yeah, and I’m like is that ok for this person to join? It’s all, nobody has had to meet face to face about that and yet out of the

## Appendix J

nine members of the team or so I got six instant replies saying “yeah add him on”, “yeah great”, you know the other three are just, well unless someone says no then we just assume its ok, just too busy you know, it’s fine. So, yeah online communication is *really* important, yeah, and very handy.

CL: Yeah, but I suppose not too much...

W: No, not too much, but there’s something quite different about face to face meetings because spontaneous things can happen, and the immediate replies and responses to somebody’s statement or idea err is very refreshing, it can be very, very creative, and email misses out on that spontaneity and that creativity. You know there can be elements of it but, you know you can cover the same territory in a face to face meeting with four people as 10 minutes when it would maybe take two hours over email, you know you’ve got to *type away* and it takes you a *long time*, you know it’s very slow. But if you’ve got a document to share with each other then actually the best way to do it is online because then people read it in the leisure of their own home, at their own pace, and can write their comments back, and that works really well.

CL: Do you feel like it kind of excludes some people, I suppose there’s not many people who don’t have access.

W: There’s only one person I know who doesn’t have access to emails, and doesn’t do emails, and that’s [name] who volunteers at our garden, you know, she stubbornly wouldn’t do anything like that but she’s also a community activist and she’s actually involved in the [place name] transition group, um and they actively phone her up to tell her when the next meeting is, you know, she goes to them.

CL: So there’s ways of getting round it.

## Appendix J

W: Yeah, yeah, and I make a point of telling her any news I come across via email and tell her about an event that I know about, um... Yeah so there's ways of getting to communicate with people out there about these things, there's some people out there who don't want to connect with that world and are also the kind of people who generally don't want to be involved with groups, you know, or connect with other people *generally*, so you know, that's fine, that's the way it is.

CL: It's probably a strange question but do you think if you were to kind of leave the group it would just kind of keep going on its own, you know how important do you see your role?

W: Um, yeah it's quite important, I think, um. I would like to think that Transition [place name] would keep going if I cease to exist all of a sudden, um I feel quite confident that that would be the case now. It might be difficult, or different if three or four key people suddenly disappeared out of the scene. Um, I'll make a comparison to [name of another local climate change activist group] because they have recently, well earlier this year, lost [name] who's gone off for a year's sabbatical to Indonesia and since then [the group] has really suffered and they've found it really difficult to keep things together. And I think that would, yeah [was it maybe too hierarchical] it's not so much, it's not about as a hierarchy, I mean that might be a factor, but it's more to do with [name] was doing everything, you know, she would go to meetings and [her name] would say everything that she had done and nobody else would say *anything*, or very little. So...um yeah, let's not get into that there's issues about that. For me to make sure that err a project can still go without my involvement means that I never start anything unless there's somebody else who's going to do it with me. You know, if I start something on my own then inevitably it becomes mine, you know whether that's you know just psychologically and emotionally so you know, I have to make sure that, just groups generally, every individual should make sure someone else is working with them on a particular thing. That's why I'm really keen on having projects around transition that are led by *teams*, you know, and not any individual working on them.

## Appendix J

CL: Yeah, that's a good strategy.

W: Yeah, I think so

CL: More kind of sustainable I suppose.

W: Yeah, yeah! And inevitably if I suddenly cease to exist then obviously the [place name] transition group would be *different*, you know, the bits I contribute to it either wouldn't happen anymore or somebody else might step in and take over certain bits of that, um...It's, yeah...I'm pretty confident it would carry on.