



Emerging from the Shadow of Climate Change Denial

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Introduction

This paper was presented at the Copenhagen Academic Blockade in 2009 and was titled ‘In the Shadow of Climate Change Denial’.² It focused on the way the climate change movement itself encompasses at least three forms of denial: the denial of *hope*, the denial of *despair*, and the denial of *power*. The paper argued that these different forms of denial derive from a focus on climate change, and that we can emerge from these forms of denial by focusing instead on the system driving climate change.

At current rates, the climate is being destabilized to such an extent that by 2100 it will be “hot enough to make most of the world uninhabitable” (McGlade in Edwards 2009). Meanwhile world poverty is being entrenched as a consequence of a capitalist economy that extracts resources with the least environmental consideration, produces commodities at the cheapest labor cost, and sells them

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through inducing unnecessary needs. The problem is not climate change or poverty or resource depletion but rather a particular socio-economic system.

The paper given at the Academic Conference Blockade argued that the way to ensure the best possible outcome in this precarious situation is through establishing a tacit alliance between three – apparently mutually contradictory – strategies. This article presents that paper, and concludes by asking whether a far deeper change is now underway, one evident in what has been called the Arab spring and the Occupy movement, and one whose key move is not to demand change but to assert our autonomy and recover our responsibility.

Part One: Three Forms of Denial in the Climate Change Movement

(i) The story that it is already too late to limit warming to below 2C

The first form of denial is the denial that we can do anything about climate change, the denial of those who assert that it is too late to stop the world warming to 2 degrees or 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels, and so too late to stop the tipping points and potentially too late to stop human extinction. The story told by these new deniers sometimes implies that there is no point changing anything because human nature is driving us to extinction. In this story the want-generating structures of capitalism can be seen as fundamental expressions of being human, as inescapable. This camp is growing fast. It includes many who previously denied climate change was happening at all, since for them this new form of denial provides another excuse for not having to do anything. But, more worryingly, it also includes many who are passionate about the need to address climate change, many who are entirely worthy of our respect.

One such person is Kevin Anderson who runs the world renowned Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of Manchester. I attended a talk he gave in Glasgow on ‘Reframing climate change: ‘impossible’ challenges. Mitigate for 2C, while adapting to 4C’ (Anderson 2009). This man, who probably knew more about the science of climate change than all of us in the lecture theatre put together, took the most positive future modeling of the data he could, and still arrived at a picture of the future in which human extinction seemed pretty much assured since ‘market economics cannot deal with non-marginal changes’ and he couldn’t see the populace and politicians being willing to embark on the dramatic changes needed.

He argued that ten years ago we could have made the transition to a climate safe economy, now we could still make it but it would be bumpy, if we wait another ten years it will be very painful and may be too late (and he was saying this in 2009). Current international negotiations, if successful, are likely to take us to 4C. To hold at 3C (if hold is possible at that temperature, with arctic melt, forest fires, and methane release feedbacks underway) would – he argued - require a 9% cut in emissions per year. He argued that we aren’t capable of cutting by 9%, that the changes this would require would be electorally impossible. Despite his

analysis, Kevin was a completely engaging presenter, getting laughs several times, especially when he said that the only way we know to cut emissions rapidly is economic recession, later adding that the collapse of the Soviet economy had cut emissions there by 5% a year, half the rate of reduction needed now.

Why did the audience find it so funny that cutting emissions meant ending economic growth? It reminded me of George Monbiot's point that 'economic growth' is our societies 'immortality project', our collective denial of our own and our planet's limits (Monbiot 2009). It can, of course, be argued that economic growth helped pull many out of absolute poverty, and that what we have reached are simply the limits of economic growth: the ecological limits (Meadows et al 2004), and also the limits in terms of greater economic growth being able to bring greater happiness (Jackson 2009, Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). However, whether that 'absolute poverty' was a consequence of a lack of economic growth, or was the consequence of the seizing of common land by those who then offered economic growth in place of greater equality, is another question. Either way, speaking with Kevin Anderson after his talk, I asked him why he didn't directly address the point and say out loud that this particular economic system is the force threatening us with extinction? His answer was arresting. He feared that if he said this explicitly then people would dismiss everything else he wanted to say. This fear—that the one thing that needs to be communicated can't be communicated—can be summed up in one word: taboo.

To break a taboo is to endanger the status quo, it is both a potentially dangerous and potentially powerful move (Douglas 1966). To deter such moves, we learn that to break a taboo will leave us no longer worthy of consideration. This helps explain why all reasonably acceptable attempts—from the Sustainable Development Commission and Tim Jackson's excellent 'Prosperity without Growth' to Green Party literature—tend to dress up the move from a growth economy to a sustainable economy in terms of improved well-being rather than going straight to the point. As any glance through the anthropological literature (e.g. Graeber 2001) makes clear that there are thousands of ways of meeting human needs; and as feminist critical geography (e.g. Gibson-Graham 2006) also demonstrates that these persist and reinvent themselves. The unpalatable point is that this economy is perpetuated by those whose obscene wealth is ultimately built on killing people, species, ecosystems and the planet and that it has to stop, and be completely transformed, and now.

From one perspective, those with this obscene wealth are the very few financiers and millionaires, the 1% at the top of the capitalist system. Michael Albert recently wrote that "saying we are the 99% aggressively pinpoints a very small group who have overwhelming power and wealth in society. They are owners. They are capitalists. They are on top. Addressing this is good." (2011).

However in global terms, the line between the 1% and the 99% may – in wealthy countries - be the line between what Albert calls the 20% coordinator

class, who have a relative monopoly on empowering tasks, and the 80% working class, who end up doing jobs composed of only disempowering tasks. Albert adds that:

“There is a very strong dynamic by which if we don’t give some serious attention to the differences between the roughly 20% - advocates of participatory economics call them the coordinator class - and the disempowered roughly 80% - who we can call the working class - the former coordinators will over time wind up dominating the latter workers, in turn transforming working class aspirations for classlessness into coordinator class agendas for coordinator rule”. (Albert 2011)

Echoing both the 99:1 and 80:20 distinctions, Kevin Anderson recently estimated that (following Pareto’s 80:20 rule) 50% of world’s emissions come from roughly 1% of world’s population (Anderson 2011a). Speaking more candidly in a recorded question and answer session at DFID after his presentation he asked: “Who’s in this 1%?” and answers:

“Well, it’s people like me: virtually every climate scientist around the globe, climate journalist, any OECD (or other) academic, anyone who gets on a plane once a year, and in the UK anyone earning towards £30,000 a year would be in that 1%. So that’s the group in the 1%. Then you have to ask yourself: ‘Are we – principally in Annex 1 countries, the wealthy parts of the world, but also probably 200 to 300 million Chinese – are we the 1% sufficiently concerned to make, or have in force the legislation and regulation to make, the personal sacrifices and changes to our lifestyle now to help the rest of the population and future generations, if not we are happy to countenance the strong probability of a 4 degree future?’ So there is no easy way out of this and we shouldn’t pretend that there is. That is the question we, the 1%, have to ask ourselves; and it gives us some agency because we know who needs to change”. (Anderson 2011b)

In response to the story that it is too late to stop at 2C or 1.5C:

It is crucial to be clear that we **haven’t** gone past 2 degrees, or even 1.5C. We have seen temperatures rise 0.8C from pre-industrial levels, and we are committed to another 0.6C from the impact of emissions in the pipeline from the past 30 years industrial activity. But we are only committed to going past 2C or 1.5C to the extent that we are committed to an extractive exploitative industrial economy - break that dependence, and we can break the socio-economic-ecological cycle driving us towards greater climate chaos.

Undoing our dependence on this system cannot be done from within the rules of this economic game but requires the political will to change those rules. Dramatic, effective and efficient legislation - rather than ineffective targets and

trading - could have a huge immediate impact on emissions. A report from the Swiss Bank UBS recently stated that:

“By 2025, the European Emissions Trading Scheme will have cost consumers 210 billion euros. Had this amount been used in a targeted approach to replace EU’s dirtiest plants, emissions could have dropped by 43%, instead of almost zero impact on the back of emissions trading” (Point Carbon 2011).

In a similar vein, Anderson - in his 2011 presentation - points to the extraordinary level of energy waste that could be reduced by 70-90% over ten years simply through legislation. For example with standard cars tweaked for efficiency and with restrictions on any increase in the number of cars on the road, you could reduce emissions from cars by 50% by 2020, and if you could reverse trends in occupancy you could reduce it by 70% by 2020, even without any shift to public transport or electric cars (Anderson 2011a).

In the Q&A session that followed his presentation, he suggests that to hold at 2%

“is just about possible . . . the rate of change we would need would be the sort of social change you get in times of war. . . . The wealthy part of the world would have to reduce its emissions almost immediately, and the only way we can do that is to consume less . . . In developing countries they’d have to build low carbon rather than high carbon infrastructure, and they’d have to do this almost immediately, which would cost more . . . so part of the funding for that needs to come from the wealthier parts of the world. This is not as aid, this is as reparation. . . . If all this was put in place, we would have some outside chance of holding at 2 degrees. . . but let’s not pretend this is not hugely challenging. The wealthy part of the world would have to take a significant hit in what we consume for a decade or two, and a significant proportion of our wealth would have to be being passed over to the developing part of the world. If that mechanism was put in place, and almost immediately, then we would have some chance of avoiding the worst excesses of climate change”. (Anderson 2011b).

(ii) The story that progressive action from within this system will be sufficient

Part of the reason why the need to break our dependence on this economic system isn’t stated so baldly, is because of the second form of denial. This is held to by climate change negotiators, and by campaigners. It is based on a story that tells of progress, of what we are capable of because of the great leap we made from tradition to modernity. It tells us that we have overcome slavery, the Berlin wall, apartheid, and that this is just the next (the biggest) call for progressives to succeed.

Despite the fact that all those campaigns contained within them the possibility of transformative radical systemic change, the way the story of those

moments is told is that they were movements that fulfilled and strengthened societies core values rather than challenged them (see Brian Barry 2005).

The denial here is that there is anything fundamentally wrong with our system, it is the assertion that we have progressed; and this is a really difficult issue to address since - relative to the systems of domination that drove the enclosures in England, or the clearances in Scotland, with the victims then being used to appropriate other people's lives and lands throughout the world - relative to these systems of domination, those within the magic circle who benefit from economic growth have indeed made progress, whilst all outside that circle continue to be crushed. As the magic circle of the beneficiaries expands, the pressure on those people and ecosystems they exploit becomes intolerable.

Meanwhile, relative to commons systems of social and ecological resilience (systems that have persisted throughout the world where systems of domination have not yet crushed them) what we see as the progress of including in moral worth an ever-expanding circle of human and non-human beings, is not the outcome of a modernity that is supposed to be making us better than those who went before, it is simply the natural human tendency to reassert relations of equality and commonality (Kenrick 2009a).

In response to the story that progressive action can affect the necessary change:

It is crucial to be aware of the way radical and effective ways of mobilizing the mainstream around vital issues can not only lead to welcome radical change, but can lead to an unwelcome distraction from the real issue that needs to be faced. There are some worrying parallels between the 10:10 campaign in the UK that so effectively broadcast the need to cut our emissions by 10 per cent within 12 months, and the 'Make Poverty History' campaign in 2005 that so effectively brought together a huge coalition to place global poverty on the international and G8 agenda, yet so spectacularly failed to achieve any real change on the ground.

As Bob Geldof pointed out at the 2007 G8 meeting in Germany two years later, the earlier campaign resulted in the deepening – rather than the alleviation - of world poverty. Having drawn many campaigners into supporting his attempts at high profile celebrity persuasion at the earlier G8 meeting, Geldof pointed out that this has resulted in increasing promises from the G8 but an actual reduction in their aid for Africa. His conclusion was that “This world government bollocks just doesn't work. . . .if this is how they keep their word to the needy . . . who trusts them on climate change?” (Bell 2007, p. 40-41). However, Hewson (2005) argues that Geldof failed to recognize his own role in mobilizing the public to *support* the G8 rather than to *oppose* it's poverty-generating policies. Similarly, Free Association note that:

“Make Poverty History sucked energy away from any wider movement against capital. Before 2005, summit demonstrations had been at least

protests, if not concerted attempts to physically shut meetings down; in stark contrast, Make Poverty History *welcomed* leaders of the G8 to Scotland, essentially inviting them to sort out the world's problems.” (2010, p. 1020-1021)

From a very different perspective, Papadimitrou (2008) argues that the radical ‘Dissent!’ protest against the 2005 Gleneagles G8 failed to have any effect because it failed to connect with the mainstream. Hewson agrees when he writes that:

“It is not enough to simply take direct action against summits or, at a wider scale, corporations, governments and the Far Right. We have to explain why we are doing this to people who are not in ‘our movement’.” (2005, p. 139)

Taken together these critiques suggest the need for those seeking ‘politically realistic’ change from within the mainstream and those seeking ‘humanly and ecologically realistic’ change from the radical fringes, to work equally hard at making bridges to each other through broadening their critique of the system, and through sharpening their ability to recognize and seize strategic moments for change. If, instead, they remain divided and neutered then the status quo can claim that only it can act for positive change - as it has at the climate summit at Durban in 2011, and did at the G8 climate summit at Heiligendamm in 2007 (Free Association 2010).

In ways that are very reminiscent of the 2005 ‘Make Poverty History’ campaign, the 10:10 campaign mobilizes celebrities, the public, civil society institutions and—in this case—companies and branches of government to pledge to reduce their emissions by 10%. But one exception is permitted, that is the corporations. In signing the 10:10 pledge, companies are the only bodies that are not required to reduce their actual emissions by 10%, they are only required to reduce the carbon intensity of their activities by 10%. Their emissions can expand infinitely and they will still be deemed to have fulfilled their pledge as long as their greater production involves 10% less carbon per unit produced. This is understandable in an economy reliant on externalizing costs, and in which those who refuse to expand are displaced or taken over by those who do expand, but by the same token it shows that we need to rapidly change the framework set by the current paradigm and power relations rather than be constrained to ‘succeed’ within them.

This is why James Hansen stated that he hoped that the Copenhagen negotiations would fail rather than ‘succeed’ in establishing targets and ‘solutions’ that would guarantee run away climate change. Hansen is described as “vehemently opposed to the carbon market scheme—in which permits to pollute are bought and sold—which are seen by the EU and other governments as the most efficient way to cut emissions” (Hansen 2009, p. 1). Hansen added that “We’ve got the developed countries who want to continue more or less business as usual, and then

these developing countries who want money and that is what they can get through offsets [sold through the carbon market]” (Hansen 2009, p. 2). If setting targets is simply a way of postponing action today, and of setting up money making schemes for the powerful in the Global North and Global South, then—he argued—we should hope for the failure of such negotiations.

Clearly there is a proud history of progressive action enabling radical change, but it has only led to real change only when it has demanded the ‘impossible’, rather than sought ‘success’. The abolitionists did not listen to those who said that the entire economy and well-being of society depended on slavery, that slavery was a natural part of human nature, and that since the powerful backed slavery it could never be abolished. The abolitionists simply said slavery was wrong, and starting from that position sought what they were told was the ‘impossible’ and succeeded. In a similar vein, starting from the position of opposing the whole system of economic growth on which we are told our well-being depends would be seen as making as impossible a demand as that of the abolitionists. Starting by asserting that carbon emissions, world poverty and resource depletion are driven by a system of economic growth in which the costs of that growth are born by those least able to speak, would lead us to assume that governments and corporations are not the right tools with which to tackle climate change since their economic system is to social and ecological well-being what slave owners were to slaves.

(iii) The story that withdrawing our support from this system will be sufficient

The third form of denial in the climate change movement, is one that is often held by those who work tirelessly to make the transition to local economic and social resilience, and who say by their actions that we can still halt short of warming the world by 1.5 or 2 degrees centigrade, and that we can re-enliven the soil and return to stability.

The story that their actions tell (although not necessarily their words, since the dominant cosmology is so all pervasive) is one that denies that our power rests on the structures of modernity, it is one that makes no room for empowering the powers that be (whether through reformist beseeching or oppositional reactivity). Instead it insists on the re-emergence of diverse local to global networks of co-operative need-meeting structures. This move is especially evident in the Transition initiatives that have spread rapidly through Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and elsewhere.

This is a powerful and crucial response. Despite taking root within societies where the dynamics of capitalism (including wage-labor and consumerism) is all-pervasive, this cosmology-in-action insists that we can live with each other and with the planet in a way that ensures all our well-being. One question, however, is how radically and speedily this approach could enable us to reshape reality. Can it, for example, enable us to look at the cities' roads and buildings not as dead obstructions in the way of growing food and producing energy, but as opportunities for the same? Can we imagine and use the cities roofs, roads and sides of buildings

as structures that extend the space for harvesting sunlight, wind and growing food . . . can we recover the ever-present energies of the earth from beneath the tarmac, the sun and wind from structures on our roofs, and the energy in the flows of water in our streams and rivers and seas? In the Transition vision, it is not that roads and connections between places are torn up, but rather that they are rethought with a priority given to growing food locally and reducing the need for long distance travel, whether that be food miles or commuter miles. This Transition approach—rather than seeking solutions through renewable energy being imposed by large corporations and governments to maintain the economic growth cycle—seeks to build resilient communities of place. Places in which individuals and households have a say in shaping and enabling resilience, rather than being passive producers, or passive consumers in the vast shopping centers where we are taught to spend our ‘free’ time.

Transition initiatives often seem to exist in a parallel world—developing local currencies, orchards, community food growing areas, community energy sources—sketching a different re-localized way of meeting our needs grounded in peoples’ strong sense that this system cannot continue. This manifests itself not only in projects focused on meeting material needs, but in a form of organization where no-one tells anyone else what to do but people coalesce around projects they feel passionate about.

The denial that often accompanies this approach is a denial of the need to also engage with the dominant systems of power. Local authorities are often engaged with as potential partners to open up food growing spaces, bring in local currencies, support community renewables or push for changes in local transport, but the larger frame of power that may have a vested interest in disrupting such processes is avoided rather than confronted.

We may not be interested in the powers that be, but when we start being successful in transforming society those powers become interested in engaging, deflecting and appropriating our efforts. This denial of the need to address dominant power, a denial that accompanies many Transition and other similar community-level responses, is both enabling (by refusing to even engage with the powers that be, and so refusing to become swamped by the practices and thinking that shapes their power) and is potentially disabling (since those powers are still there, and soon become engaged in regulating and reshaping such initiatives). In Scotland, community groups that have refused to engage with the powers that be have often missed out on very useful funding opportunities, while those groups who have sought to secure funding from the Scottish Government’s Climate Challenge Fund have had to change their broad and transformative focus on building community resilience to a narrower focus on cutting measurable carbon emissions.

In response to the story that such systems collapse if we withdraw our support:

It is crucial to remember that there are incredibly powerful vested interests that will do anything to stop us from withdrawing our support, and it is crucial to be aware of the uncertainty and fear which can arise in us when we seek any such withdrawal from the system we have been taught we are entirely reliant on for our well-being.

The Transition Culture website asks “How might our response to peak oil and climate change look more like a party than a protest march?” This is an incredibly helpful way of mobilizing and involving people to take real community building action. This approach moves us away from the reactivity of protest and into the creativity of constructing sustainable and equitable need-meeting structures, in place of the want-generating ones beloved of consumerism. However, the ability of the pre-existing system to co-opt or crush such moves is historically absolutely clear.

So how can these three stories help us to disentangle ourselves from forms of denial that block our creativity and our ability to act effectively? How can these stories challenge and transform each other?

These stories entrap us if they persuade us: (i) that all is already lost, (ii) that change can only happen from within the system, or (iii) that we do not need to address issues of relational or structural power. However these same stories help us when they are telling us that:

1. To the extent that we are enmeshed in the current socio-economic system, we are heading for extinction, fast; that
2. To change this system we need to redirect it, as well as oppose it; and that
3. To transform this system we need to create alternative livelihood systems, and find creative ways of communicating, replicating and defending equitable and sustainable pathways.

Part Two: Can we ally Three (Apparently) Mutually Contradictory Strategies?

The story that it is too late to stop climate chaos, is—when taken by itself rather than in conjunction with stories of place making or system transformation—a story that is increasingly prevalent amongst many who acknowledge the reality of climate change, and is one which enables people to resign themselves to living with this ‘reality’ while absolving them from having to take action in a way which might disturb their place in the structures driving climate chaos.

However, this denial story can also be a straightforward expression of despair, an acknowledgement of the consequences of the impact of insatiable economic growth on ecological limits, and as such it often accompanies a belief in one of the three other stories—whether the potential for system change from

within, the possibility of place making despite the system, or the need for transforming the system through confrontation.

These different stories lead to people adopting very different strategies for social change, strategies we are all familiar with. This part of the paper seeks to explore how we might enable these three apparently contradictory strategies for radical social change to work together despite being based on very different analyses of human nature and human society.

The assumption here is that none of these three strategies is ultimately right or wrong, that all express different aspects of our social experience, and that therefore the key task is to not be divided amongst ourselves, but to find ways of allying approaches which focus on: (i) the potential for system change from within, (ii) the possibility of place making despite the system, and (iii) the transformation of the system through transformational non-violent confrontation.

(i) Place Making or Confronting the System – how should we understand power?

In their critique of the Transition movement—‘The Rocky Road to a Real Transition’—Paul Chatterton and Alice Cutler distinguish between the lasting systemic changes they argue we need to work towards, and what they see as the less substantial place based changes the Transition movement encourages people to focus on. They argue that “changes to place don’t really add up to a long lasting and substantial transition, not least globally” (2008: 33). Chatterton and Cutler argue that the Transition movement is in danger of focusing peoples attention on making changes to their locality, a focus that can deflect them from pushing for the systemic changes that are urgently needed, and they argue that these Transition initiatives carry the potential of inadvertently absolving the State of its responsibilities (to the extent that it still exists) by themselves taking on community service roles.

In this critique, Chatterton and Cutler’s understanding of the fundamental nature of power is diametrically opposed to that prevalent in the Transition movement. They write that, rather than Transition initiatives being able to create resilient places that seek to build need-meeting functions which are not governed by economic growth, they are ultimately subject to the same order of oppression.

In contrast, Rob Hopkins, one of the key figures in the Transition movement, argues that Transition initiatives can “come in under the radar” (2008) —making radical changes which are at first not particularly noticed by the powers that be—and can thereby help to transform the systems that are driving extinction. He quotes Vandana Shiva: “these systems function because we give them our support, but if we withdraw our support, these systems will not be able to function” (Shiva 2008). Coming from Vandana Shiva, this is anything but simplistic, it is a call to recognize the depths to which we become complicit, as men or women, in systems

that oppress us all. Rachel Brinker describes how in *Staying Alive* (1989) Vandana Shiva argues that:

“The feminine principle is based on inclusiveness and its recovery in men, women, and nature, is the recovery of “creative forms of being and perceiving” (1989, p. 53). Shiva proposes that the feminine principle is killed in Western women by the association of passivity as a category with the feminine (1989, p. 53). In men, this principle is squashed by the notion that “activity” is destruction rather than creation, and “power” is domination rather than empowerment.” (1989, p. 53).”

Can Transition’s focus on place-making creatively empower the marginalized while actively resisting a system built on marginalizing? Does its focus on the importance of establishing ways to meet our material needs echo Shiva’s eco-feminism that “makes no distinction between “basic needs” (food, clothing, shelter) and “higher needs” (freedom and knowledge)”? (Brinker 2009)

Rob Hopkins argues that the key distinction to make here is between a focus on *localism* and a focus on *localization*. He writes that:

“localism can perfectly well take place within a globalised growth-focused economy, a ‘business as usual’ scenario . . . (hence its appeal to mainstream political parties), whereas localisation carries within it an inherent social justice and resource-focused critique of globalisation (Bailey et al. 2010, North 2010), emerging from concepts such as Limits to Growth (Meadows et al. 2004), Steady State economics (Daly 1977) and Schumacher’s (1974) concept of ‘Buddhist economics’. Localisation is a social movement and a principle for social and economic reorganisation, whereas localism is a principle for political organization. (Hopkins 2010)

So is there a way of engaging in place-making so that it can support all others to secure their places against the forces that seek to persuade us that each spot on the globe consists merely of coordinates on a global grid laid out by state and market: a uniform field which determines everyone’s and everything’s rights and roles (as observed by Kirby et al 1995)? Is there a way in which attempts to establish sustainable and equitable bottom-up need-meeting structures can work with attempts to focus on system change?

Theoretically it is hard to see how they can be reconciled, due to their very different understandings of power. However, in practice many people move between at one moment being focused on rebuilding resilient localities in a way which focuses on building relationships and attending to place making, and at another moment focus on protesting and confronting policies and developments (be they airport expansion, road building or coal fired power stations) which they

experience as being imposed on them by the unequalizing system of economic growth.

Although in theory these understandings of power appear to be diametrically opposed, this may be more because we can experience power in very different ways rather than because one analysis of power is right and the other is wrong. When Chatterton and Cutler write about Transition Towns in the way they do in the quotation above, they are prioritizing the existence of coercive power – a reality we can all surely recognize. However, when Hopkins highlights people’s ability to engage in creative community projects which can transform their neighborhoods then this is also a reality many of us can recognize. As Free Association note:

“a politics founded purely on antagonism quickly comes up against its own limits. The transformative power of love—whilst simultaneously coupled in productive tension with antagonism—offers the possibility of exodus” (2010, p. 1019)

Perhaps one such productive tension was evident at the Academic Blockade at Copenhagen when the police arrived to stop us blockading just as I was giving this paper. I requested them to wait until my paper was finished, which they did, and as they waited they listened and became engaged while my academic colleagues talked with them until they accepted our continuing. Another example comes from after we had been arrested and were being held in a police van during the previous academic conference blockade we had organized outside Faslane nuclear base in Scotland:

When one policeman was left on his own with us for a brief spell, I handed him a badge which said “Question Authority” on it. He looked at it and smiled, saying “my boss wouldn’t like this”. I said he was welcome to keep it, and he hesitated before smiling again and putting it in his pocket. His willingness to receive this gift involved accepting the spirit of the gift, perhaps made possible because the words on the badge and his action were perfectly aligned; not despite, but because of, his awareness of the structures of power: the gift and the antagonism being perfectly aligned. Is the gift we can give, even as we resist coercive power, strong enough to entail an obligation to reciprocate in a way which moves us all onto the territory where we can collectively and creatively recover the world? (Vinthagen and Kenrick 2008)

In line with this, Hopkins analysis highlights the existence of a very different sort of power: there is not just coercive power, but also power that is grounded in real relationships of care, one which is most evident in connections people have with place and with each other. Such power has little to do with resistance or conformity, but much to do with the way in which the value of specific goods and practices depends on "whether they contribute to flourishing or suffering" (Sayer 2005, p. 217).

The egalitarian indigenous peoples whom I have worked with as a social anthropologist and indigenous peoples rights activist in Central Africa and elsewhere would disagree with Chatterton and Cutler's argument that "changes to place don't really add up to a long lasting and substantial transition, not least globally" (2008, p. 33). Such peoples often argue that place is the most important thing on earth, it is the earth; and attending to place is the most revolutionary act we can engage in, one which can conserve all that makes us, and which can thereby enable humans to be responsive to the needs and realities of other species. Such peoples argue that by becoming more fully aware of these relationships that make us, we can become aware of who we really are (see also Rose 2003, Blaser 2004, Ingold 2001, Kenrick 2009b, Shiva 1989).

Whilst being aware that acting at the level of international and national negotiations is crucial to their survival, indigenous peoples often state that the best way to support them in their struggles is for those of us in the Global North to work out what our struggle is and get on with it, to work out how to reclaim our place so that we no longer support a system that is absorbing and destroying their places and their livelihoods, just as it has absorbed and destroyed so many of ours. This is because the central understanding of power in such societies is very different to the understanding of power that is dominant in the Global North.

Most of us in the Global North have learnt to understand *Power as coercion* by a particular collective process of alienation: an understanding which recognizes the apparently all encompassing impact of governmentality, and the sense of self and reality engendered by this which permeates our lives. This particular understanding of power is evident in Deleuze's reflection on Foucault:

"If at the end of it Foucault finds himself in an impasse, this is not because of his conception of power but rather because he found the impasse to be where power itself places us, in both our lives and our thinking." (Deleuze 1988, p. 96, cited in Free Association 2010, p. 1032)

In contrast, the Canadian Cree and many other indigenous peoples understand *Power as relational*, as emerging out of (and as recognizing the primacy of) particular relations: an understanding which recognizes the generative power of our agency, and our ability to call on and so help engender others awareness of their agency. This understanding of two distinct forms of power is also evident in much anarchist writing such as Holloway 2005, 2010 and Starhawk 1988, 2002, see also Bloch 1986; and in much anarchist practice in the 'movement of movements' since the Zapatistas.

Harvey Feit, in his important essay on Cree notions of power, writes that for them:

"...power is an emerging coincidence between the anticipation (social thought) and the configuration of the world (event), a congruence that this anticipation helps to actualize through action.... 'Power' is a social

process, a relationship in thoughts and actions among many beings, whereby potentiality becomes actuality...Power in the Cree sense may have analogies to a concept of truth, i.e. thoughts that come to be. We might say that in this view the power that is worth seeking is truth unfolding in social relationships, rather than power as a control of one person over another” (Feit: 2004)

This suggests quite a startling potential resolution to the question of whether emancipation from systems of domination can only be achieved by seizing state power (something which is implied by Paul Chatterton and Alice Cutler’s 2008 analysis, but is present very explicitly in Callinicos’ writing, e.g. Callinicos 2005) or whether we can change the world without taking power (a perspective evident in Rob Hopkins 2008 writing, but also in Holloway’s writing, e.g. Holloway 2005, 2010).

In describing a situation that has parallels with the way community buy-outs on the West coast of Scotland, such as on the Isle of Eigg or at Assynt, have had to navigate their way in relation to more powerful others, and the way any moves to autonomy have to negotiate with state systems, Harvey Feit writes about the difficult political relationships the Cree have to negotiate with more powerful non-Cree others. He writes about the way in which the Cree fundamental orientating metaphor of interrelationship—of trans-species personhood—translates into a political injunction to remain open to dialogue with the land and with non-Cree human others, rather than simply seek to exploit the land for individual profit or simply oppose more powerful outsiders even though those outsiders may be seeking to destroy their socio-ecology.

The implication of the Cree perspective is that rather than either seeking to seize power through confronting the system, or refusing to take power by creating alternative livelihood systems “under the radar”, perhaps we too can act in a way which reconfigures, redistributes and re-orientates power through remaining open to those who appear to still be holding all the power in terms of the ‘control of one person over another’. Turning from this discussion of different understandings of power and of Feit’s writing on Cree understandings of power, I will now examine whether their ways of navigating dominant structures of power may give some clues as to how such a process can be carried out in relation to power and the need for system transformation in the Global North.

Can we respond to the urgency of the situation by acting in a way which reconfigures, redistributes and re-orientates power through remaining open to those who appear to still be holding all the power? Can we redirect mainstream structures and thinking in our society, while at the same time building alternative lifeways, and when necessary confronting and halting the boom and bust cycle of economic growth? An economic growth cycle which—when it is booming—destroys the ecology on which we depend, and—when it is going bust—threatens the economic well-being of even those who thought they were benefiting from this exploitative

process: both the boom and the bust being driven by “the imperative to earn a living” (Denning 2010: 80).

(ii) Re-orientating the mainstream – what is the truth about climate change?

If we base our response to the urgency of the situation simply on opposing the system, our actions can strengthen those very aspects of the mainstream we are seeking to change. Chatterton and Cutler make this very clear when they write that:

“There’s a saying: at first we were ignored. Then we were ridiculed and laughed at. Then when our ideas started to become effective, we became a real threat and they defeated us” (2008, p. 21)

However theirs is a very pessimistic reworking of Schopenhauer’s original perception that:

“All truth passes through three stages: First it is ridiculed. Second it is violently opposed. Third it is accepted as being self-evident” (Schopenhauer 1788-1860).

Gandhi, describing his successful campaign of non-violence against British rule in India, reworked this even more positively, saying:

“First we were ignored. Then we were ridiculed. Then they fought us. Then we won”.

And a Green party activist in Scotland, commenting on the mainstream response to Green Party policies, tells this in a form closer to Schopenhauer’s original:

“First we were ignored. Then we were ridiculed. Then they tried everything to stop us. Then they claimed our ideas as having always been theirs.” (Danny Wight pers. com.) A point amplified by a colleague’s ironic point that ‘nobody now believes in apartheid – or ever did’ (Bridget Fowler pers. com.)

These different reworkings of Schopenhauer’s original comment on the process through which dominant understandings of reality change quite dramatically, point to the extraordinary lengths to which those who benefit from the dominant understanding are willing to go to in order to deny the truth. They also (apart from in Chatterton and Cutler’s version, in which such change is always stopped) point to the inevitability of their having to accommodate themselves to that same truth. In relation to climate change, it is clear that everyone will ultimately acknowledge its reality, the question is whether that will be once it is too late, or whether it will be in time.

All concerned governments have accepted the scientific assessment that – in order to prevent runaway climate chaos - warming should not exceed 2°C above pre-industrial levels. In order to contribute to this stabilization, the UK and Scottish Governments seek reduction targets of 80% by 2050 (from 1990 emission levels)

for historically high emitting (industrialized) countries in order to contribute to a Global reduction in emissions of 50% by 2050.

However, the UN IPCC's 2007 Fourth Assessment Report itself made clear that, in order to limit global temperature rise to 2°C, global emissions must fall by 85% [not 50%] by 2050, a fall which would still lead to a rise in concentrations of CO₂ in the atmosphere of approximately 450ppm. It is acknowledged by all the relevant reports that global emissions cuts can only be achieved through global equity (i.e. through apportioning the same rights to emit to all people in the world), so this Global target of 85% required to keep us below 2°C can clearly only be met by countries such as Scotland making cuts of 95% or more by 2050 (relative to 1990 emission levels).

The 2007 IPCC report was, however, based on scientific findings and modeling from 2006 and earlier. Since then, the range of possible future scenarios on which the IPCC bases its targets, have been left behind by subsequent empirical evidence. What is now clear is that processes such as Arctic melting, methane being released from beneath the melting permafrost, and the weakening of the ability of the oceans, forests and soil to absorb carbon, are all happening far faster than the IPCC predicted. Furthermore, since these processes are both the result of global warming and themselves amplify that warming, it is dangerous to think—as Governments, scientists and campaigners have done up until now—that a certain level of warming is 'safe' and to then aim to restrict the emissions increases and degrees of warming to that level.

Once the 'positive' feedback loops start to kick in, it will be extremely hard to stop them simply amplifying themselves in ever-accelerating feedback loops, however much we cut our greenhouse gas [GHG] emissions. For example, where the IPCC predicted an Arctic ocean ice-free in summer by the end of the century, it is now predicted this will happen by 2015, eighty years ahead of IPCC predictions made in 2007 (PIRC 2008).

Furthermore, the melting Arctic leads to less heat being reflected back into space since the dark ocean absorbs the heat that the white ice reflected, which leads to greater warming, which itself leads to more of the Arctic melting, and so on, a process that at some point becomes entirely independent of our level of GHG emissions, and a process that has a huge impact on the melting of the Greenland ice sheets, sea levels, the ocean currents, temperature increases, and so on. The key point is that we have to make a dramatic cut in the bulk of our GHG emissions now. If we are to slow down and have a chance of stopping these runaway processes, we must create a zero-carbon, not low-carbon, economy.

The science clearly saying that current targets guarantee catastrophe; and not just catastrophe for poor people in poor countries, but catastrophic climate change and possible extinction for us all (PIRC 2008). As noted above, Kevin Anderson of the Tyndall Centre argues that current negotiations for global agreements will

guarantee levels of GHG in the atmosphere that will directly cause catastrophe. He concludes that

“it is increasingly unlikely any global agreement will deliver the radical reversal in emission trends required for stabilization at 450 ppmv carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e). Similarly, the current framing of climate change cannot be reconciled with the rates of mitigation necessary to stabilize at 550 ppmv CO₂e and even an optimistic interpretation suggests stabilization much below 650 ppmv CO₂e is improbable.” (Anderson and Bows 2008, p. 1)

Where even the IPCC's 2007 forecasts would require the UK and Scotland to aim for GHG reductions of above 95% by 2050, the emerging science calls for us to urgently stop and reverse forms of economic growth which require us to continually accelerate the extraction of carbon from the ground to pass through our economy and into the atmosphere.

It is for this reason that climate scientists like James Hansen say that a safe level of CO₂ in the atmosphere is somewhere below 350ppm and we are already at 387 with global temperature change accelerating as the runaway process starts (Hansen 2008). That means that to have any hope of averting a massive extinction event we have to take CO₂ out of the atmosphere by rapidly reducing our emissions to zero, while protecting and enhancing the resilience of the soils, oceans and forests to act as carbon sinks to—over decades—draw down the CO₂ already emitted. This is a far greater global emergency than even a World War, since the very survival of our species is at stake. Brian Davey has pointed out that entering into a world war (in this case a 'war against climate change') involves no guarantee that one will see victory, and it isn't done on the basis of cost benefit calculations. You enter it because you have no choice, and - pulling together - you try everything possible to succeed (Davey 2009).

In World War Two Britain managed the huge switch in resource allocation that is required when people acknowledge there is an emergency and start working together. In World War Two military outlays (as per cent of UK national income) rose from 16% in 1939 to 55% in 1941 (Harrison 1988, p. 187). This is the scale of resource redirection required, a redirection which would—as in previous world wars—also create full employment and social cohesion, and—if approached right—also create an international level playing field for zero-carbon economies and so support the emergence of resilient communities interacting to build sustainability through equity, since survival for any one is only ensured through ensuring survival for all.

It is important to recognize the absolute centrality of equity to combating climate change. Turner, Stern, McGlade and all who have analyzed the situation are clear that controlling climate change requires a globally equitable approach, if people in poorer countries are to participate in solving a problem that has

historically been brought about by the actions and economies of the nations which have become wealthy through such action and economies.

Man-made climate change is the consequence of industrial activity, and accelerating climate change emissions are driven by basing our economy on fossil fuel use, and on an approach which measures GNP in terms that reflect the throughput of carbon through the economy. Since even the International Energy Agency (which, up until its 2008 report, was denying that Peak Oil was anything other than a distant eventuality) now admits that Peak Oil is fast approaching³, the action we have to take to stop accelerating climate change is action which can also prepare us for a world in which fossil fuels are no longer cheap and easily available.

The IEA report also states that we are set “on a course of doubling the concentration of [greenhouse gases] in the atmosphere by the end of this century, entailing an eventual global average temperature increase of up to 6C” (IEA 2008, p. 11)

From the perspective of those in the mainstream, the first key move is to recognize what the science is telling us, then to recognize that the steps which are technologically, economically and socially required of us will not only: (i) ensure our technology is at the cutting edge; (ii) place our economy in pole position to benefit from helping other countries to subsequently take the steps that—sooner rather than later—they are all going to have to follow us in taking; but will also (iii) enable us to make our communities resilient and vibrant places to live.

A report by experts from Hewlett Packard (2008) examines five sharply different scenarios for a 2030 world. Recognizing the gravity of the situation—and that climate change will be the backdrop to all business, political and human decisions over the coming decades—they make the business argument for greater climate change regulations now:

“Acting quickly is best for liberal markets. Some of the strongest objections to addressing climate change have been that we will constrain markets, and hence our freedom, at too high a cost. People have feared that climate change was a cover for rolling back the market reforms of the last decades. But in our scenarios, liberal market-based solutions seem much less attractive as time goes on than statist responses. This puts a different light on how to defend freedoms from market reforms.

“Advocates of liberal markets should act as soon as possible, pushing for a global agreement with teeth, national measures that use financial incentives, and the removal of market distortions that encourage unsustainable and wasteful

³ Peak Oil is the point at which we have used half the available oil, after which supply will never be able to meet demand.

resource use. The result may be a more constrained market system than today, but the long-term alternative could be a desperate turn to big government and protectionism” (2008: 69)

They go on to argue that “the historians of the future will call these the climate change Years”. If we have not acted soon enough “they may look back at us with a complete lack of comprehension or even disgust, rather as we look back on slave-owners. Or if climate change feels solved, or on the way to a solution, they may look back on us as heroes.” (2008: 70). In arguing for taking immediate steps now they add that: “steps taken now could open up previously impossible or unimagined paths of hope for combating climate change” (2008: 68).

The key distinction here is between (i) action which creates hope through not only directly reducing emissions but also inadvertently setting up a range of unanticipated positive knock on effects; and (ii) becoming paralyzed either by despair, or by a hope that someone else will do something (or as Lord Turner remarked, paraphrasing St Augustine on goodness: Lord, make me carbon neutral, but not yet).

(iii) A 3-Pronged Strategy: *Working through the mainstream, Place making despite the mainstream, and Confronting the mainstream*

Can we adopt a 3-Pronged Strategy in which we draw on scientific expertise and mainstream values to mobilize a war effort to rapidly confront our predicament, we pursue place making Transition initiatives that begin to create communities with relocalized resilient need-meeting structures, and—drawing on positive mainstream values and resourced by such initiatives—we also confront this socio-economic system head on and demand the changes everyone increasingly recognizes are urgently needed to respond to the interlinked financial, resource and climate crises?

In Scotland a range of people from very diverse climate active community initiatives came together in 2008 to develop a way of strongly encouraging politicians in Scotland to adopt a policy framework that would enable Scotland to make the transition to becoming a relocalized resilient equitable and dynamic zero-carbon society and so demonstrating to the world that it is not only possible to reverse the processes driving climate change, but that it doing so creates a far better world for us all. In a nutshell, we are calling on the Scottish Government to establish a top-down policy of Cap and Share which will dramatically reduce and then stop the flow of oil, coal and gas into the economy, and will do it in a way which will ensure the rapid shift to non-carbon alternatives, ensure a rapid narrowing of the wealth gap, and ensure local economies become viable and local communities resilient (see www.holyrood350.org).

The community initiatives we are involved in seek to involve people in tackling the causes of climate change by developing localized organic food growing systems, local renewable energy systems, etc. We do not simply seek to

reinvigorate local zero-carbon economies, we also seek to change Government policy so that it can enable rather than continually block communities' attempts to develop resilience.

The approach we are taking echoes the way the Cree seek to retain open dialogue not only with the land and other species, but also with those who may be seeking to destroy their land, whether through logging or damming it. Rather than working with the Government and hoping they will create the conditions for a sustainable society, we are getting on with it and are asking them to stop getting in our way. Rather than campaigning against the Government and making them the central players in the drama, we are strongly encouraging them to recognize the truth of the situation, and to recognize that their own electoral self-interest – contrary to their apparently 'realistic' but short-term assumptions - lies in adopting the policy framework we are proposing, a framework that has emerged from our experience on the ground.

While seeking to harness the mainstream by engaging with politicians in this positive way, our community initiatives bypass the mainstream as we seek to develop resilient autonomous local systems. In ways which echo the Cree, we are seeking to act in a way which reconfigures, redistributes and re-orientates power through not only remaining centered in ensuring the well-being of our localities, but also remaining open to those who appear to still be holding all the power in terms of the 'control of one person over another'.

As Gandhi clearly demonstrated, there is a very real place—alongside recovering submerged commons systems of mutual care, and alongside developing respectful dialogue with those in power in order to persuade them that they need to recognize and enable change—there is a very real place for respectful confrontation. This is a form of confrontation that he developed into an art form: a way of confronting those with power that asserts the very values they believe their system is based on, but which the confrontation reveals are evident in the movement for change which the powerful are opposing rather than in the system the powerful seek to defend. Gandhi's salt march to the sea to reclaim Indian's right to collect salt, or the civil right's campaign to reclaim the right to sit as equals on buses, are examples of this.

Such confrontation is non-violent not because people refrain from violence out of fear of the overwhelming power of the state, but is non-violent because people are aware of the overwhelming power of their case, and because they are certain that those upholding the status quo will ultimately have no choice but to accept the change they are calling for, will have no choice but to respect their right to their way of life.

Transition and other community-focused responses to climate change, to resource depletion and to the need to revitalize community, are seeking to recover a way of life that acknowledges limits and takes pleasure in doing so. Such practices can involve creating and maintaining community growing spaces and community

orchards, while opposing superstores; they can involve cycling and car share while opposing air travel; and can involve reducing energy use and developing community owned renewable projects while objecting to coal, gas or nuclear power. The creative focus gives such community initiatives an authority when in respectful dialogue or confrontation with the powers that be, an authority deriving from their sense of their being the authors of their own destiny rather than being dependent for their identity on either being acquiescent, or being in opposition, to prevalent power structures.

However such confrontation need not simply be between populations and Governments. Respectful confrontation is central to healthy human relationships. An experience of respectful confrontation—and of what it would be like to be in a co-operative need-meeting (as opposed to an enslaving want-creating consumer) society—occurred when I went into a bike shop in Glasgow on my way back from the Kevin Anderson seminar described at the start of this paper. I wanted to buy a new much faster bike and the man working there said no, he wouldn't sell me the £500 bike that I wanted. I asked "Why not?" and he said that my old bike was sturdy enough to carry the huge amount of books and laptop I obviously lugged around with me every day, and the faster bike wouldn't be sturdy enough for that work. I said "but I want a bike that requires less effort" and he took one look at me, and at the excess weight I carry around my belly, and said "No, you need the exercise". I left the shop with my old bike and have delighted in the effort of riding it ever since.

One of the commonest responses to that story is for people to say, in effect, that he only took that approach in order to boost his business over the long term. David Graeber points out that this assumption that peoples motives always come down to maximizing self-interest permeates our thinking, yet is based on a cynical assumption concerning human nature: that no one ever does anything primarily out of concern for others. It is an assumption perpetuated by the socio-economic system it legitimizes: one which reduces social relations (relations which involve a whole range of moral obligations grounded in reciprocity and mutuality) to objects (Graeber 2001, p. 8-9). He points out how the so-called 'realists' are as obsessed with self-interest as the so-called 'romantics' are with altruism:

"There is no area of human life, anywhere, where one cannot find self-interested calculation. But neither is there anywhere one cannot find kindness or adherence to idealistic principles: the point is why one, and not the other, is posed as 'objective' reality" (Graeber 2001, p. 29).

The 3-pronged strategy outlined in this paper, whilst necessarily partial and incomplete, is based on recognizing and working with this far more complex, rich, contradictory, resonant and relational picture of reality than the crude dualistic one which the dominant paradigm seeks to perpetuate.

It is our choice whether the paradigms misperceptions will be revealed as it drives us off the ecological precipice, or will be revealed by our choosing to take a

different path: one which involves the respectful confrontation of those currently wielding dominant power, requesting that they recognize themselves in our actions.

Postscript: Occupying Place

The Academic Conference Blockade at Copenhagen is part of a long history of resisting coercive power by occupying a place and refusing to move. It involved giving academic papers as overview vistas of our predicament, and located this act in a particular place for a particular purpose drawing the police in as observers, listeners, and in some way participants. “Climbing uphill, the horizon grows wider; descending, the hills gather round” (Clark 2000: 22).

One way of engaging in place-based resistance is through defending or recreating the place-based commons systems outlined above. Another is evident in the history of protest camps in the UK: peace camps, road protest camps, climate camps and now the Occupy camps that—like Transition initiatives—have come in from the periphery and are occupying the central spaces and squares.

The primary purpose of such non-violent direct action is to create situations of juxtaposition and even conflict—not in order to win a particular battle, but in order to insist on dialogue: to insist that voices that have been dominated, silenced or ridiculed be heard. If the focus is on winning a particular battle to mobilize public opinion to achieve a certain end, then there may be a tactical victory but no long-term success. On the other hand building long-term success can go hand in hand with failure to close a base or obstruct a power station, or failure to reach the airwaves.

What is being attempted is to shift the ground of dialogue from wrong and right, power and righteousness, to questions of fundamental human need and experience. What is being sought is not for others to change society but for us to reconfigure our understanding of reality. This approach suggests that without recovering our understanding of who we are as humans there is no way of securing a future.

Free Association writes about social movements’ demands as emerging from “cramped spaces”:

“Social movements typically grow from “cramped spaces”, situations that are constricted by the impossibilities of the existing world with a way out barely imaginable. But precisely because they are cramped, these spaces act as incubators or greenhouses for creativity and innovation. Social movements that grow from these spaces might form around antagonistic demands (more money, better housing, withdrawal of the police) but they also produce their own problematics. By this we mean they throw up concepts, ideas, desires that don't “make sense” within existing society and so call forth new worlds.” (2010)

However, rather than “cramped spaces”, it may be better to understand Occupy, Transition, and emerging sister movements as creating ‘real spaces’ within

which community can struggle to flourish, and from which a deeper sense of who we are and what we want can emerge and resonate with the wider society. This may be as much about seeking to mend the world we live in as to ‘call forth new worlds’.

This is why process rather than demands is the substance of such movements and occupations: the process of re-learning how to live together, an act which may appear to be fringe, but which—when it includes participants from the far fringes and the core mainstream—carries the liminal power to transform society (Turner 1969, Van Gennep 1909, Graeber 2001) by enabling us to reconfigure our sense of reality. Val Plumwood writes:

“Think what it would mean to acknowledge and honour all the places that support you, at all levels of reconceptualisation, from spiritual to economic, and to honour not just this more fully-conceived ‘own place’ but the places of others too. Such a program is politically radical, in that it is incompatible with an economy of privileged places thriving at the expense of exploited places. Production, whether from other or self-place, cannot take the form of a place-degrading process, but requires a philosophy and economy of mutual recognition.” (Plumwood 2008, p. 7, see also Roelvink, Gerda and J.K. Gibson-Graham 2009)

Clark writes that “the first of all pleasures is that things exist in and for themselves” (2000, p. 41) because each thing is a crystallization of the relationships which have made it, and all relationships unravel and reform as new things. Acknowledging the unique and dynamic nature of things means recognizing that power in the Cree sense does not lie with those who seek to impact on others but is enabled through re-establishing relationship with others. However acknowledging the shaping power of discourse and history is only liberating if it does not simply focus on the ways we are shaped by structural forces of power, but also focuses on the ways we are shaped by relationships of trust. What is needed is not simply an archaeology of knowledge but an ecology of experience; not simply a genealogy that tracks flows of coercion and productive resistance, but a recognition of the place of trust, serendipity and the open-ended nature of relationships.

Here in Edinburgh, as in hundreds of cities across the world, people have for months now occupied a public space and are camping out in it, handing out leaflets, holding discussions and showing films about how the financial system is driving savage social inequality and ecological destruction. The traffic thunders by, and passers by walk on or pause at this collection of tents in St Andrews Square where there is as much focus on process—on the challenges and possibilities of living together—as on campaigning.

The range of participants is extraordinary: from mainstream idealists seeking to change the system, to the homeless and others who have suffered the rough end of the system. Managing the inevitable abuse that comes the camps way is not easy, especially from drunks on a freezing Friday or Saturday night. One response has

been the emergence of a group—mostly from the rougher end of camp—that deals with security, the members of which have ‘love police’ emblazoned across the back of their fluorescent jackets. One man, who had slept on other peoples’ couches for years, described his experience at Occupy Edinburgh by saying:

"I feel at home. We're having an effect. We're doing something. It's the end of bitterness for me. Waking at 4 in the morning on a Friday night to hear the drunks climbing over the fence and being met by the ‘love police’, and just hearing them talk about the state of the world, it makes it worthwhile".

Re-establishing dynamic open-ended processes—whether through the ‘love police’, the clowning of the protestor, the academic blockade, or the general assembly in an Occupied square—allows us to use moments of structural coercion, or of trust breaking, to deepen our skills of trust making. It enables us to recognize that structural power is nothing but a freezing in the flow of interrelationship. Challenging ourselves to re-enter the flow and to step out of the shadow of structural inequality, means recognizing that we have equal power and responsibility. This is something which can be as challenging for those of us who mistakenly feel powerless, as it is for those who mistakenly thought they had power.

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