

A More Just Way Of Living For Everybody?

Stories of Language, Privilege, and a Transition Towns Movement in Eastern Canada



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i. Abstract:

In this thesis I explore the relationship between the transition movement and social and ecological justice. Through a case study of Transition Guelph (TG), a transition town in Ontario, Canada, I discuss how TG creates a language based on binary concepts embedded in unequal power relations, and how this language informs their actions and activism. I also discuss how language affects their own organizing, as well as the relationships they form with local justice activists interested in collaboration with TG. As someone active in the transition movement, I employ a participatory action research approach to this project, and also engage in self-reflection about my own position of power as a researcher and member of dominant social groups. I contribute a critical discourse analysis of semi-structured interview data and focus group data, through which I discuss issues of language, privilege and inclusion in transition. I also contribute three theoretical discussions which explore: how TG and the transition movement can critically reflect on power relations linked to epistemologies; steps towards overcoming 'privilege fragility' or the discomfort associated with being confronted with one's privilege; and strategies for 'coalition politics' or building meaningful relationships with activists across differences of perspectives and tactics.

ii. Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Transition Guelph and the wider transition movement as well as all social and environmental justice activists and organizers I had the pleasure of meeting during the creation of this project.

A Time for Transition

written by 7 TG members reflecting on sticky notes about transition artwork created during a focus group; arranged into a poem by Lucie Bardos

Patriarchal image...
The machine is breaking down.

Looking to natural structures for guidance:
Placid walking, strong acceptance;
Creating a liveable society,
Harmony through creativity,
Even in winter the tree lives,
Collaboration and endurance.

Speckled horizon:
Lofty heights,
vision far-reaching.

Hardy but beaten up;
Shaped by circumstance.

Myth meets reality,
Movement,
Balance,
The unknowable,
Intuition,
Equity,
Heart.

iii. Acknowledgements

I would like to first of all thank all of the research participants from both Transition Guelph and other organizations in Guelph who helped make this thesis a reality. Thank you for your time, your stories, reflections and friendship. All have been invaluable.

I would like to thank the entire 2013-15 CPS batch of students. The connections I have made with you have helped me grow as a person and as a researcher both inside and outside of the lecture rooms. Class discussions, long talks, potlucks, parties, study sessions and trips together... I will remember you guys with fondness and humour. Hopefully we will all stay in touch for years to come!

A big thanks goes to all of our professors and mentors who have helped us navigate this fascinating, emotional, political tangle that is Human Ecology. A special thanks goes to my thesis supervisor Anna Kaijser for her continued efforts in supporting me in this tricky and ever-shifting thesis project.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of my family and my partner, Victor. Without you I would never have been able to come and have this amazing adventure here in Sweden. Thank you for supporting my nomadic tendencies and always being there when I needed a sympathetic ear.

If all that Transition projects do is to make a nice cosy club for people who are already on board to hang out and talk then I would regard it as a complete failure - Rob Hopkins (co-founder of the transition movement)

Many social and political movements have ended up either burnt out, or split apart by conflict because they didn't have the inner insights and process skills to deal with their own unconscious process – which will naturally include unhealthy dynamics around power and privilege which permeate all of us however deep our aspiration to cooperation or equality. So the strongest and most lasting movements will be those which truly practice inclusivity – by rising to the challenge of understanding the different worldviews and language of those who focus on other quadrants, and who can truly embody the quality of peace and resilience that comes from valuing diversity
- Sophie Banks
(a Transition Movement Trainer from Transition Town Totness)

We can transform, but it will take us a lifetime. - Ahmeda Mansaray
(a panellist speaking about the topic of restorative justice at the OPIRG Social and Environmental Justice Symposium held in March 2015 in Guelph)

iii. Preface: A Note From The Author on Ethics and Community to Transition Guelph Readers of This Thesis

Many of you who have helped me create this work were with me at OPRIG¹ Guelph's Social and Environmental Justice Symposium in March 2015. We listened to narratives by local Indigenous women developing new feminisms and methodologies, heard stories of restorative justice following serious personal trauma, as well as alternative proposals for building more just societies. To me, the entire thing could be viewed as a dialogue on community building, which is one of the foundations of the transition movement and of TG. Courageous, subversive, laughing, these activists reminded us to always be humble as we organize, to try and let go of ego and usher in a solidarity that both cuts through and embraces difference. They encouraged us to reflect on how we are entangled in webs of power and oppression that wrap around our language, and inform what we know about the world in ways that are sometimes hidden until we actively challenge and question them.

They told us that trauma is a social phenomenon that is experienced on one level by individuals and on another by communities. Guelph, as well as millions of other communities, has experienced traumas of colonization, oppression, and violence caused by both past and present actions; affecting everyone - yet some in more and different ways than others. TG is certainly doing difficult and necessary work in trying to work through these traumas and create a place-based and socially connected community that can have high hopes of sustaining itself and helping other communities do the same in heading towards an uncertain future.

I do my best in this work to practice the empathy and respect for TG that I truly do feel, while at the same time tackling topics, such as alienation and stagnation, that are difficult and uncomfortable for me to write about and I'm sure, for you to read about. With that said, it is my hope with this thesis to provide some key insights for steps that TG can take

¹ Ontario Public Interest Research Group: a social and ecological justice activism hub connecting academic and community activists. It is based at the University of Guelph, as part of a larger group of Public Interest Research Groups (PIRG's) existing in Canada and the U.S.

in order to organize in solidarity with other actors in the community and work towards an agency that is reflexive in terms of power, privilege, sources oppression, and truly representative of the local peoples, needs, and opportunities for increased resilience.

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1.0 Introduction

Recent decades have seen an increase in economic disparity, climate change, social isolation, and a sense of distrust towards governments and dominant economic models. Central to human ecology is the study of the manifold relationships between human and non-human communities through a critical focus on the unequal distributions among these communities of rights, access, privilege, wealth and resources. There is also a focus on understanding systemic issues tied to industrial capitalism, which are responsible for maintaining the status quo - or "business as usual" (eg. Malm and Esmailian 2012, Plumwood 2002, Bauman 2004, Hornborg 2011). There is a sense of urgency in human ecology - we feel the need to create new narratives that will compel global actors to behave differently in times of escalating ecological and social crises. Although research in this field often centers on studying global energy flows (e.g. Hornborg 2011, Abel 2007), there is also a focus on small-scale local contexts where new sustainability-related narratives and practices might be adopted (e.g. Gooch 1998).

As a response to the coupled issues of climate change and peak oil, the transition movement was born in 2006 in Totness, England. It proposes a re-localized and community-based approach to building social and ecological resilience heading into an uncertain peak-resource future. The movement was inspired by deep ecology, systems

thinking and permaculture principles², and focuses on re-localizing food production and economies, re-skilling citizens to be more self-sufficient, and building more socially cohesive and diverse communities (Hopkins 2008a). It and has gained speed over the past few years and has embedded within it suggestions for more egalitarian social and ecological structures (Hopkins 2008a, 2012). At the same time, while the movement calls for change at a town or community scale, it is largely made up of people from dominant or privileged social groups and has been criticized for its lack of engagement with politics, social justice, privilege, and other related topics (Alloun and Alexander 2014, Bulkeley and Fuller 2012, Chatterton and Cutler 2008, Cato 2008, Poland 2013).

As Bulkeley and Fuller (2012) point out, in many cases of low carbon communities, much more work needs to be done in the area of social justice as this topic tends to be dealt with passively rather than actively, especially when engaging minorities or "hard-to-reach-groups" (11). They also call for an exploratory and community-based approach to this research:

[b]y engaging communities, it seems, policy and actions will be more inclusive, responsibilities for action may be shared, and the risks and benefits of the low carbon transition more evenly distributed. However, the extent to which such community-based approaches to climate change mitigation can live up to these expectations has yet to be fully explored. (2)

It is my hope that I can contribute to the body of work on this issue with this thesis paper, while engaging in an intersectional analysis that can contribute to the body of human ecological work on the intersections of culture, power and sustainability.

My thesis thus aims - broadly speaking - to critically explore the relationship between the concept of social and environmental justice and the transition movement. My initial interest in researching the transition movement came from my personal interest and participation in this movement over the past few years. Between August and November

² Permaculture is an approach to systems design that looks to ecosystems for inspiration and is based on three core ethics: care of Earth, care of people, equitable redistribution of surplus yields. It is utilized in the design and development of food and material producing systems as well as social systems such as businesses and communities (e.g. Holmgren 2002).

2014, I was engaged in a permaculture education internship³ in Guelph, Ontario, which allowed me to get to know a lot of the same people that are active in Guelph's local transition movement⁴, Transition Guelph (TG), which is why I decided to conduct a transition town case study on TG.

I come to this project with a conceptualization of justice informed by certain feminist intersectional research which sees environmental and social justice as inherently intertwined in terms of analysing and challenging unequal access to, and distribution of, the resources necessary for life (eg. Dichiro 2008, 2006, Silliman and King 1999). My research questions are guided firstly by an epistemological concern for how TG creates knowledge about justice, and secondly, a concern regarding how TG interacts with other justice-based organizers in Guelph. My research is therefore guided by four key questions:

- How is justice conceptualized in TG's language?
- How does the way that TG conceptualizes justice engage people who participate in justice work outside of Transition Guelph?
- How does the way TG conceptualizes justice affect the relationships between TG and other organizations working on justice issues?
- How can existing TG language and organizing be made more inclusive and collaborative through intersectional perspectives?

I very much respond to the statement by Bookchin et al. (2013) that: "[t]here is a wide range of advocacy research in universities that comments on and about activism without expecting the work to be directly engaged with it" (6). With this in mind, I would like my research to be *for* TG and created *with* TG. I see this thesis as a time capsule, capturing some salient characteristics and challenges associated with justice discourse within TG.

³ This internship consisted of helping the founder of a permaculture education start-up organization develop a support network and curriculum for permaculture-based youth camps.

⁴ The person I was interning for is also the president of the board of directors of Transition Guelph and so was able to connect me to TG and the people working in it.

An executive summary of this thesis will be presented to TG, which will highlight suggestions for reflections and actions that TG can take to face the challenges I discuss.

I believe that this kind of research is best done through reflexive, qualitative approaches that capture how people think, feel and act in a movement. I experienced some personal moments of reflection on power and privilege as a participant observer during the first period of thesis research, which informed my choice of research topic and my approach to this project. I therefore include these reflections as a preface to my empirical analysis after explaining my theoretical framework and methodology. I then engage in a critical discourse analysis of the themes that emerged from my semi-structured interview data and focus group data, concentrating on topics of language and privilege.

Following the data analysis, I delve into a theoretical discussion section in which I aim to provide some guidelines for TG in response to Alloun and Alexander's call for research into ways in which transition initiatives can foster inclusion without "othering" (8). As stated by Kaijser and Kronsell (2013): "[f]eminist theorists have pointed to the need for creating alliances based not on fixed identities but on common interests and solidarity, and with recognition of different positions (Haraway 1991, Mohanty 2003, Lykke 2010)" (423). Given that we are in a time of overlapping social and ecological crises, I firmly believe that we need all hands on deck. This means different movements moving together in collaboration to achieve what cannot be achieved in isolation. It is therefore important for me to situate TG within a wider framework of local movements and examine ways in which deep and meaningful transactional relationships may be built to foster hope for viable ecological and social sustainability.

I should note that, as this is a case study and I engage with in-depth qualitative research methods and methods of analysis, the aim of this study is therefore *not* to make generalizations applicable across the transition movement, but rather to explore how transition relates to justice in this particular case. That being said, some of the findings that come out of this work could be inspirational or useful to other transition initiatives or organizations, which may be facing issues or contexts similar to those of TG.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 *What is the Transition Movement?*

The transition movement was spearheaded by permaculture designer Rob Hopkins and began with a project for Kinsale Further Education College in Ireland in 2005, which was entitled the Kinsale Energy Descent Action Plan. With the help of Naresh Giangrande it was put into place in Hopkins' hometown of Totness, England, which became known as the first Transition Town in 2006. The movement has since offered a positive, solution-oriented way of re-localizing economies through local currencies; attaining better health through local organic food production; and gaining community resilience and empowerment through various forms of organizing at the community level (Hopkins 2008a). While focusing on re-localization, the movement also supports innovation in areas such as technology, agriculture, horticulture, ecological building/construction, education, and whole community organizing (Hopkins 2008a). The movement thus views a transition to low-carbon lifestyles as both a challenge and an opportunity to build more resilient communities in the spirit of "getting up and doing something constructive about [peak oil and climate change] alongside our neighbours and fellow townsfolk" (Transition Network 2013a).

The main idea is that a transition to lower carbon lifestyles is inevitable, but that by coming together in community, people can decide how, and to some extent, when, this transition can take place. In order to facilitate the necessary shifts in consciousness, transition is also about looking inward or engaging in 'Inner Transition' as well as 'Visioning' to explore inner landscapes, identify the inner challenges moving forward towards transition, and finally to build an inclusive vision of what future transition communities might look and feel like (Transition Network 2013c). These parts of transition draw heavily on the deep ecology and spiritual work of eco-philosopher Joanna Macy in order to guide personal reflection in times of crisis (Hopkins 2008a).

The ideas behind the transition movement were initially meant as "a detox for the West" and "alternatives to development", given that Western societies tend to consume the most and have the most fossil-fuel-intensive economies, which have a disproportionate

negative impact on communities in the Global South ("Transition In Action" 2014). There are now over one thousand so-called 'transition Towns' or 'transition initiatives' mainly concentrated in the Global North, with some notable examples in the Global South, such as Transition Brasilandia in Brazil. An online hub called the Transition Network acts as a connector and map of transition towns to "inspire, encourage, connect, support and train communities as they self-organize around the Transition model, creating initiatives that rebuild resilience and reduce CO2 emissions" (Transition Network 2013b).

1.1.2 Transition Literature Review

The literature about transition can be divided into two broad categories: the books, articles and online material written by movement founders and members, and the academic and activist literature that *analyzes* the movement. Some of the core transition texts include *The Transition Handbook* (Hopkins 2008a) and *The Power of Just Doing Stuff* (Hopkins 2013) as well as *The Transition Companion: Making Your Community More Resilient in Uncertain Times* (Hopkins 2011) - a more updated book in which suggestions are made for moving forward with transition by drawing on inspiring stories from existing transition towns. In this category there are also a few transition texts that deal with more specific issues such as local food (Pinkerton and Hopkins 2009), local economies (North 2010) and building sustainable homes (Bird 2010).

Even though the transition movement is quite new, in the realm of academia the body of work on this topic is growing (Neal 2013) - perhaps because as a social movement, transition proposes to face huge global challenges through simple, doable, community-based initiatives. The question thus emerges: to what extent is this possible? Several approaches have been taken to studying transition. Some literature evaluates transition as an overall movement in terms of how it defines and achieves success (Feola and Nunes 2013), its capacity to foster low-carbon lifestyles (Cato 2008, Middlemiss and Parish 2010, O'Rourke 2008, Brook 2009) or counter capitalist cultures (Stevenson 2010), as well as the political implications of proposed re-localization (North and Longhurst 2013, Bailey et. al. 2010). Some studies examine whether or not governing an energy transition

to low-carbon alternatives is actually realizable (Smith 2012) and how the concepts of urbanity and rurality are approached through transition (Neal 2013).

What is of particular interest to myself as a researcher, is another category within academic work written about transition, which includes critiques in terms of transition remaining very much a white, middle class movement that should be engaging in more and more diverse ways with discussions around power, politics and social justice (Alloun and Alexander 2014, Bulkeley and Fuller 2012, Chatterton and Cutler 2008, Cato 2008, Kenis and Mathijs 2013). I have noticed that transition co-founder Rob Hopkins sometimes engages quite actively with these critiques, responding to them through his transition blog, sometimes listing ways in which critiques have misunderstood the transition movement, attributing this to "diverging opinions of how change happens" (Hopkins 2008b), and other times admitting the need for more work in certain areas, such as social justice: "[quoting Chatterton and Cutler] "We need to question models that look to a few experts for the answers, especially when these people are mostly well-educated, white males". Absolutely, and this is an active ongoing debate within Transition" (ibid).

In his review of *The Transition Handbook*, Poland (2013) identifies a gap in terms of reflexivity in core transition literature stating: "what is lacking from a critical social science perspective is a deeper social analysis of the power relations that have created and continue to support unsustainable levels of environmental and social injustice and exploitation, and which are leading to a ruinous collision with the natural and social limits of the earth and its inhabitants" (Poland 2013, 386). As a proposal for how this research might be approached, Alloun and Alexander (2014) write:

Rather than condemning the movement for its perceived lack of openness or elitism, it may be more constructive to investigate the barriers that prevent the Transition movement from 'responding to a diversity of needs by using a diversity of strengths' (Pickering, Diversity Coordinator in Transition Network, 2011). (7)

In my opinion, investigating specific barriers can be undertaken with in depth, qualitative research, which is lacking within the critical work on transition. It is in this area that I aim to contribute with this thesis.

1.1.3 Introduction to Transition Guelph

Guelph is a university town with roughly one hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants and is about a one-hour drive from Toronto, Canada. Transition Guelph (TG) is the local transition initiative in the city. As an organization and local movement, it has been in existence since 2008. The structure of the organization includes a board of directors as well as eight working groups: Local Economy, Reskilling, Inner Transition, The Narratives Project, Urban Food, Fair Trade, the Building Group and Transition Healthcare Resilience. These groups are composed of volunteers who work on various projects together, including the seven major TG projects, which are: Backyard Sharing, The Guelph Community Orchard Project, The Appleseed Collective, The Guelph-Wellington Timebank, Treemobile, Transition Streets and the yearly Resilience Festival. The Council of Working Groups made up of volunteers from each group reports to and communicates with the board of directors to maintain communication across all areas of the organization. According to the TG mandate, anyone who wishes to form a working group can do so. TG organizing focuses not only on working groups meeting and working on projects, but also general meetings, movie screenings, talks and workshops, as well as their annual week-long Resilience Festival. TG also has diverse partnerships with local organizations including the local alternative outdoor education school, a social and ecological justice organization, and a skill-building hub. TG has adapted its Seven Principles of Transition from the ones listed on the Transition Network site; they are: positive visioning, help people access good information and trust them to make good decisions, inclusion and openness, enable sharing and networking, build resilience, inner and outer transition, and subsidiarity: self-organisation and decision-making at the appropriate level.⁵

Most TG organizing happens in the downtown core and sometimes in nearby suburbs; this is the case, for example, with the weekly potlucks. My connection to TG came through an internship that I was doing for a separate permaculture start-up organization founded by the president of the board of TG. Through this work, I got more interested in

⁵ For more information or descriptions of specific working groups, projects and principles, see transitionguelph.org.

TG and started attending events and speaking to people. My main involvement in TG was as a participant observer, event participant, and leader of one workshop on community currencies in Guelph.

In the following section, I outline my approach to this research project in terms of my ontological and epistemological stance, as well detailing my methodology and methods.

2. Methodological Approach and Methods

2.1 Ontology and Epistemology

In a broad sense, I would like to base my ontological standpoint on a constructivism that melds gestalt ontology (Naess 1989) and feminist constructivist viewpoints (eg. Haraway 1991, Thayer-Bacon 2010). Gestalt ontology, as elaborated by Arne Naess ([1989] 1995) describes:

... the self as a form emerging from a constantly changing formless whole – like a wave emerging in the rapids of a river. In the same way that the wave cannot be removed from the rapids without being changed beyond recognition – or more likely completely destroyed – the self cannot be meaningfully removed from its whole ontological gestalt. (in Key and Kerr 2011, 54)

Naess describes a relational ontology based on the idea of the "ecological self" which can be understood as a part of several wholes that can be linked to other aspects of nature and ecology, but also other people, objects, and contexts. These wholes are not universal or discrete, nor are they a denial of difference or individuality; they are more of a conceptualization of relationships, in which one category of relationships always fits within a broader category (Naess 2005, Diehm 2002). Feminist and eco feminist scholars have worked on this stance in order to incorporate a stronger relationship to - and awareness of - the issues of responsibility and difference. According to Diehm's interpretation of Naess's gestalt ontology, Naess recognizes that "our concern for individuals must take note of the networks of relations that allow them to flourish" (31). At the same time, Diehm sees shortcoming in Naess's ontology in that it does not focus

enough on difference as a difference of *intention*. He points out that: "the making real of the self as relational being, would have to be seen as a function of our dialogue with the differences of the world" (34). Feminist educator and author Barbara Thayer-Bacon (2010) elaborates the idea of transactional epistemology in which: "we are not spectators to Reality reporting on "it;" we are part of this world, this universe, affecting "it" as we experience "it" and so, everything/one in it (149). I believe therefore, that this relational dialogue with wider gestalts also has the effect of changing us upon every "transaction", so knowledge creation is not just about the making of the self, but about the *co-making of selves*.

2.2 Theoretical Framework, Concepts, and One Important Assumption

The main theoretical framework that runs throughout this thesis is feminist critical theory. I am aware of some of the *many different feminisms* that exist, as well as of contradictions present within the body of work broadly defined as feminist theory (Gorelick 1996, 23). Its diversity and overarching sense of responsibility is actually what attracted me to it. In fact, I do not specifically focus on gender relations in this thesis, but rather engage critically with other issues explored in feminist research such as power, privilege (Goodman 2000, 2011, Valentine 2008, Diangelo 2011) relational epistemology (Thayer-Bacon 2009, Plumwood 2002), and collaborative action (Dichiro 2006, 2008, Mohanty 2003, Maiguashca 2005).

I am specifically drawn to the principle of intersectionality as an analytical tool, which can be defined as 'the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power' (Davis 2008, 68 quoted in Kaijser and Kronsell 2013, 18). I use this concept as an analytical lens throughout my data analysis and in my approach to my theoretical discussions, as I explore issues of power, privilege, alienation and collaboration in TG.

Feminist critical theory also includes the concept of situated knowledge (Haraway 1991) in which knowledge is not regarded as objective, but as produced in social contexts and is a reflection of someone's individual positionality, taking into account limited perceptions.

It: "offers a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others' practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that makes up all positions" (1991, 187). This concept informs the idea that positioning oneself in their own research, allows a researcher to lift the illusory veil of objectivity, which is often a characteristic of academic research, and "urges us to reflect on where we stand, to define our speaking positions and how they relate to others, especially those who we claim to speak for" (Haritaworn 2008, 3). Throughout this thesis, I therefore critically reflect on my own positionality at the intersection of the power dynamics that shape my research.

In the theoretical discussions following the data analysis, I again engage the concept of relational epistemologies (Thayer-Bacon 2010, Diehm 2002) to encourage epistemological reflection in TG. I also detail a concept I have entitled 'privilege fragility' that helps explore my research findings further, and which builds off feminist work on encounters with privilege (Diangelo 2011, Goodman 2000, 2011, Valentine 2008); finally, I engage with the concepts of 'strategic coalitions' (Mohanty 2003), 'connected knowing' (Manguashca 2005) and 'coalition politics' (Dichiro 2008) to explore ways in which TG might work in collaboration with other movements.

My use of theory is completely saturated by my basic assumption of there being an urgent need for diverse social and environmental movements to collaborate instead of staying completely within the bubble of the specific issues they focus on. I believe that engaging a diversity of voices, approaches and tactics is the only way for them to be effective at promoting social and environmental justice, simply because of the systemic, multi-layered and complex nature of the issues they aim to address. I have fostered this opinion through my studies in human ecology, personal life work, thesis fieldwork as well as reading the works of the above authors.

2.3 Methodology

As a methodological framework for my chosen ontological and epistemological approach, I have decided to employ participatory action research (PAR), which can be defined as "research by, with, and for people affected by a particular problem, which

takes places in collaboration with academic researchers" (Kindon et. al. 2008, 90). As language and power are key concepts that have emerged from my thesis work, I was drawn to PAR due to its "engagements with both productive and negative effects of power through attention to language, representation, and subjectivity" (ibid.). PAR fits with the main feminist theoretical framework that I use given that "[b]oth participatory action research (PAR) and feminist research have been developed by researchers aiming for involvement, activism and social critique for the purpose of liberatory change" (Gatenby and Humphries 2000, 89).

This methodology is highly collaborative in nature as has as a central aim to "empower people [...] through the process of constructing and using their own language [and] [...] of consciousness-raising..." (Gatenby and Humphries 2000, 89). My thesis aims to raise consciousness about how language is embedded in power relations and used to construct knowledge. Still, I am aware of the fact that as a researcher I am in a position of power and that "[r]esearchers are not separate, neutral academics theorising about others, but co-researchers or collaborators with people working towards social equality" (Sommer 1987 in Gatenby and Humphries 2000, 90). I approach this issue by being reflexive about my own position in the field, as well as about my own approaches to Transition in the past. I do my best given the limited scope and resources available to me to work in collaboration and in dialogue with the other research participants while keeping in mind that "[t]he research relationship is inherently hierarchical; this is simply part and parcel of the (conflictual) role of the researcher" (England 1994, 250).

2.4 Insider or Outsider?

I have to admit that I struggled throughout this thesis-writing process with the positionality of insider/outsider and with my own discomfort with the privilege of being a constructor of knowledge about TG. I could say, for instance, that I'm an insider as a permaculturist and participant in transition initiatives in both Guelph and elsewhere; I firmly believe in and identify with the community-based, bottom up, grassroots approach to building social and ecological resilience. What's more, I made friendships and acquaintances with some of the members of TG and this certainly contributed to my

sense of enthusiasm and engagement in having this as my topic of research. At the same time, however, as I only lived in Guelph for eight months as an intern and researcher, I did not have enough time to really see myself as a deeply connected member of the community of Guelph or as a true organizer with TG. I always knew that my stay in Guelph would be transitory, yet it makes me sad and uneasy to think about writing a thesis about an organization, then simply moving on and moving away. I therefore try hard to make this thesis a community-based and constructive work that explores difficult and uncomfortable sides of TG, and to some extent, myself.

2.5 Methods

2.5.1 Case study and Interviews

I designed my thesis as a case study of a transition initiative, since I see justice as something very personal - a realm of personal stories to be specific. Being already situated in Guelph for an internship relating somewhat to my thesis and connecting me to many of my interviewees, gave me a good context for interview-based qualitative research. Given that my research questions center on peoples' perceptions, definitions, opinions and experiences of justice and transition, a case study is appropriate as it allows me access to in-depth subjective data.

I conducted a total of nine recorded semi-structured interviews (Seidman 2006) and one e-mail interview⁶. The interviews were conducted in Guelph, Ontario between November 2014 and January 2015. While I had a series of the same base questions that I asked all of my interviewees, discussions on various topics were also generated between the interviewees and myself, in which they sometimes asked me questions or explored tangent stories and topics. The interview questions are available in Appendix A.

The interviewees were contacted based on their involvement in TG in a snowball sampling fashion (see for example: May 2011, 145), with most recommendations coming from other interviewees. They ranged from the founders of TG, to active or occasional volunteers, to people heading organizations that have different levels of partnership with

⁶ I was not able to see this person face to face due to illness.

TG, as well as people who had participated in TG events in the past but who no longer do so. I selected some interviewees based on their active involvement in TG and others based on their organizing in justice-related activities.

At the beginning of each interview, I briefly described the nature of my master's degree as well as my topic of research. I told them that I would do my best to maintain their anonymity through changing their name and not disclosing any personal information. This was important given that Guelph is a tight knit community in which many activists and organizers know each other. Some subjects came up in the interviews, including alienation and stagnation, that relate to TG as an organization, but which are sensitive and personal. I wish for the focus to be on awareness of discourses and *not* on who said what, which could undermine one of the aims for this project: to foster collaboration across difference.

I also told research participants that they could back out of the research process at any time and could add material to their interviews if they wished via e-mail. I did not have time to fully type up each interview and send it back to the research participants for review and verification, but I sent each participant the quotes from their interview that I include in the thesis and gave them the option to change or delete whatever they wish. I also presented some key interview quotes as well as the main emergent themes of the research to date at a focus group session I lead, and detail later in the text.

2.5.2 An Expansion: Who Are The Research Participants?

The research participants other than myself are a range of actors connected at different levels to Transition Guelph. I started off by interviewing those most connected to TG, including its founders, board members and frequent volunteers. In general, these tended to be people who, like myself, hold more intersecting privileges in categories such as race, socio-economic status, able-ness, age, and gender, although it is important to note that some were also part of non-dominant or marginalized social groups along some of these categories. As I read about the problematic nature of privilege (eg. Goodman 2000, 2011, Diangelo 2011) and my interest in TG's language and its resulting discourses deepened, I began to search for people who still had ties to TG but who could diversify

the conversation about justice. I therefore sought out actors who are working in areas of social and ecological justice but still connected in some way to TG.

I found these voices in areas that include both grassroots initiatives built from one or a small group of individuals all the way to local branches of national NGO's. Some of these projects are well established and others are still budding. They range from food justice, to ecological and social justice work on local (Guelph-based), provincial and national issues. Some of these organizers are also connected to one another through collaborative projects and friendships.

When I refer in the rest of the thesis to "justice activists" or "other activists" I am mainly referring to this category of people, who generally have weaker ties to TG and also organize outside of TG. I realize that this is problematic since core TG members and frequent TG volunteers could *also* be referred to as justice activists, however I have settled on using terms that refer to the participants primary form of organizing (eg. "core TG member/organizer/volunteer") for the sake of clarity.

Justice activist participants tend to have more problematic relationships with TG; some of them are people who have attended meetings in the past and have tried to forge a relationship between their justice-based organizing and TG but have become disenchanted. Others have successfully forged active partnerships with their organizing/organizations and TG but dedicate most of their energy to justice work that is not explicitly a part of TG (though it may be TG-supported and vice versa).

In general, I'd like to note that it is very difficult for me to define in words or images peoples' relationships with TG since there is no clear definition of what a "TG participant" or "TG Member"⁷ is. This is due to the nature of the transition movement, in that it is possible to be in/part of the movement but do most of the "moving" from home - that is, more or less independent of TG, the organization. The Transition Movement could thus be likened to what Haenfler et al. 2013 describe as "lifestyle movements"

⁷ It is possible to purchase an official membership in order to financially support TG, but this is not necessary in order to volunteer. The word "TG Member" is often applied to TG volunteers regardless of whether or not they are official members.

which "consciously and actively promote a lifestyle, or way of life, as their primary means to foster social change" (2). While TG does focus to a large extent on collective organizing in the form of general meetings, informational events, workshops, and celebratory events, as one active volunteer, Lisa, told me: "the beautiful thing about transition is that you don't have to be part of the movement per se [...] you don't have to wear it on your forehead: "I am a TG member" to be able to live that sort of lifestyle". I therefore decided that it was unnecessary to categorize the research participants into more specific, discrete groupings because I believe that such an attempt at describing their relationship to TG would never be truly accurate. However, noting that some clearly demonstrate a strong relationship to the movement, while others feel a relatively weak one is very important, as I discuss in my analysis.

2.5.3 Focus Group

As part of my participatory action research approach to co-creating my thesis, I facilitated a reflexive and art-based focus group activity with some of the core TG research participants once the interviews were complete. In order to create the most accurate and useful "time capsule" possible, it was important for me to bring my preliminary findings back to TG and get their input on how these findings would translate from the interviews to the data analysis. I also wanted to give research participants extra and diverse opportunities to voice concerns or contribute new insights to the research, to allow space for knowledge to emerge through art, and for critical reflection to take place in a group setting.

The inspiration for incorporating an artwork element into the focus group came because I found out that a structured collective art activity that should have happened at one of the TG general meetings had to be cancelled. I decided to step in and carry out a similar activity as a way of gathering a different type of data for my thesis and still allowing the activity to take place. I decided to simply incorporate this activity into my already planned meeting/focus group session with members of TG. The focus group was thus divided into the art-based activity and the reflexive activity.

The focus group took place on Feb 26th, 2015, over a period of 3 hours at the home of the co-founders of TG, and involved a group of 7 active TG members. To offer a discreet way to reflect on sensitive issues around privilege and power, at the start of the focus group, I gave the participants a small notebook each, and told them that they could write whatever they wanted and hand them back to me at the end as additional data.

The art-based activity was facilitated by myself was carried out with the focus group participants sitting on the ground with one large piece of paper each and a set of drawing/colouring materials in the middle of the circle. The theme of the activity was Transition Landscapes and participants were asked to draw landscape elements that corresponded to different topics relating to their personal journey in transition. A full description of the activity steps is available in Appendix B.

In the second part of this focus group, I began by reflecting on my own privilege and explaining insights I had gained during the research process (see: 'Personal reflection': a story from my field journal' after the methods section). I then verbally presented some of the relevant themes that were emerging from my research. Finally, I asked the participants to pair up and discuss several interviewee quotes that were illustrative of the themes I had discussed. I provided papers with the quotes and some guiding questions for reflection to each pair. After that, we regrouped for a final discussion.

For those who participated in the focus group session, I typed up all of the notes gathered during discussions and posted them on a Google document accessible to all participants for modification or addition of material.

2.5.4 Participant Observation and Reflections

During my thesis fieldwork I also conducted participant observation as I attended and hosted TG or TG-partnered events and had informal chats with various people connected to TG. This form of data collection actually started before I even began conceptualizing my thesis topic; it began from pure personal interest and previous involvement in the transition movement and a desire to get to know what TG was all about. Once I began to conceptualize my thesis and know that it would be about TG, I also observed myself and

paid attention to my emotional responses, noting down in my field journal when I felt comfort and discomfort. This process allowed my topic to be much more personal to me, and also allowed me to form stronger and more understanding bonds with other research participants, which was important in order to build trust and consistency throughout the research process. Data and reflections gathered through participant observation and recorded in my field journal helped me: feel more confident with the discourse analysis that I performed on the interview data, formulate my personal reflections about my own privilege and power as a researcher and person, and arrive at the theoretical discussion topics, which follow the data analysis section.

2.5.5 Critical Discourse Analysis

Given that the elements of language and privilege are important in understanding TG's relationship to justice and justice-based organizing, I have decided to conduct a theme-based critical discourse analysis using an intersectional lens on my interview material. Wodak and Meyer ([2001] 2009) state that discourse is "anything from a historical monument, a lieu de mémoire, a policy, a political strategy, narratives in a restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, to language per se" (2-3). In my case, I am interested in TG's *justice discourse* and more broadly in its *transition discourse* as gathered through the above-mentioned methods, and asking how and when these foster and/or prevent justice organizing both within TG and between TG and other organizations. I view discourse as something formed from the building blocks of language. For instance, language binaries such as "positive"/"negative" can be seen as the building blocks of discourses that value certain types of activism over others.

In my analysis I take: "a critical perspective on unequal social arrangements sustained through language use, with the goals of social transformation and emancipation" (Lazar 2005). This approach is inspired by work critiquing transition's use of non-political, or "post-political", discourse that: "obscures the fact that the construction of the social inevitably entails acts of power" (Kenis and Mathjis 2014, 174). Specifically, I am interested in exploring the effects of power relations embedded within TG's justice discourse and I wish to explore how such an analysis can promote social transformation

in the sense of fostering reflection and dialogue within TG, as well as collaborative efforts between TG and other justice-based activists and activist groups. In the spirit of collaborative research, I would also like to acknowledge that it was not only myself who performed a critical discourse analysis of language, but also the other research participants who engaged in intersectional analyses and reflections, which greatly enriched what I as a researcher can contribute.

I use an intersectional lens in this thesis to explore how the complexities of privilege are revealed through language. I realize the problematic nature of categorizing people as belonging to "dominant" or "privileged" groups, however I would like to point out that these categories are not by any means fixed and I use them mainly for explanatory purposes, to bring awareness of how privilege and power manifest through language and how that informs actions that people and the organizations they belong to choose to undertake.

3.0 Personal Reflection - A Story From My Field Journal

3.1 Introduction

Before delving into my empirical data analysis, I wish to detail one piece of my own transformational journey that took place as I wrote this thesis. Specifically I would like to explain how an event I attended as I worked on my thesis helped me become more aware and critical of my own intersecting privileges and of how I can better offer my energy to the causes that I hold dear. It was important for me to include this as an explanation and frame for the approach I take to my data analysis. It was also the story I shared with research participants who attended the focus group session that I detail in the last part of the analysis and was an important way for me to connect to them in a way that facilitated deeper reflection.

3.2 Reflection

Throughout the thesis research process I interviewed many activists working with justice-related issues, I attended workshops and symposia on the topic, and was drawn to written articles about privilege and justice. I remember one instance during which I felt guilt and

shame after going to a workshop about urban agriculture and social justice at Guelph University in January 2015. The presenters focused on Vancouver's urban agriculture scene and explored how urban agriculture is easily co-opted by dominant "green growth" discourses. I learned that even when urban agriculture starts out with the intentions of empowering low-income neighbourhoods and contributing to food security and sovereignty, if co-opted by corporate interests pushing "green growth", these projects can actually contribute to gentrification (see also Quastel 2009), while *not* contributing to urban food security over the long term. I myself had volunteered on one of the specific projects mentioned in the workshop and have been a volunteer on several urban gardening projects in Canada and Sweden. Before that workshop, I had never really stopped to think about how privilege and power were mixed up with these projects and realized that the reason I never stopped to think about it was because of my own privilege and power. As a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, educated, able-bodied, person in her 20's, I can volunteer at urban agriculture projects but never have to depend on them for my food supply. I travel a lot for work and school, and so I don't have to stop to think about where these projects might be in 10 or 15 years and whom they might be benefitting at that time.

In any case, guilt and discomfort were the first emotions I felt after the workshop. By doing lots of reading and reflecting (e.g. Goodman 2011, Diangelo 2011, Walia 2015), I have realized that this is quite a common occurrence, that it is something that can be worked through, and can even become empowering. In fact, after the initial feelings of discomfort subsided, I began to feel empowered with new knowledge and awareness in terms of the kinds of projects I want to work on and the kind of analysis I will perform before I decide to join a project or not.

The point I want to make is that this thesis is about constructing knowledge about justice and confronting privilege in a social movement: transition; in an organization: TG; but also in myself. I see myself as a part of transition and to some extent a part of TG, so any and all of the things I critique about TG and their language, also applies to my *own* language, because I know that today as well as in my past experiences as a permaculturist

and transitioner, I have certainly alienated people by not *checking my privilege*. This phrase means being aware of the privileges afforded to me (but not to everyone) that I did not earn, and looking at how they affect the ways I carry out my agency in the world. I can certainly remember how at the start of my research, I was not at all aware of the fact that "positive" and "solution-based" could ever be alienating to anyone. Checking my privilege also means listening to those voices that could help me to confront privilege in a way that promotes justice. This process started during my research through interviews and focus group work, and entails writing this thesis about things that may cause discomfort to me, and with which I am just starting to become familiar.

4.0 Empirical Data Analysis

4.1. Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis

In this section, I present and analyze my empirical data consisting of semi-structured interviews, notes and artwork gathered through focus group research, as well as some insights from personal reflections and participant observation. Through the gathering of these materials, I have attempted first of all to get a picture of how knowledge about justice is created within TG, and later, how this knowledge affects TG's relationships with a wider gestalt of justice-based activism. A critical discourse analysis approach to my data lead me to understand that there is a salient intersection between privilege and language within TG that should be addressed through careful reflection. I discuss specific topics for reflection and ideas for potential steps forward in the theoretical discussions that follow the empirical analysis.

In Transition Equals: "A More Just Way of Living For Everybody"? I show how research participants relate their organizing to the theme of social justice. This starts to unpack the theme of privilege and how it is related to a language built upon a 'more justice for everybody' narrative within TG, in which all transition organizing is seen as a movement in this direction. I juxtapose this to the articulations of what justice means made by activists working with justice issues outside of TG.

In *Binary Language and Othering*, I focus on dualistic categorizations or binaries that play a large role in creating the language used in TG's justice discourses. I talk about how they inform knowledge about TG's attitude *towards* and relationship *with* other activist groups and individuals. Specifically, I explore how knowledge is produced about both TG and other activists by being filtered or sifted into binaries such as: "holding actions"/"new initiatives"; "anger"/"love" and "solutions"/"protest".

In the following section: *Binaries, Alienation, and Privilege* I discuss how nature of this language is moulded by the demographic currently participating the most actively in TG, which is in general composed of white, middle class, educated, "downtowny" (so-called by research participants) people who, in general, hold more intersecting privileges than those organizing with other social and ecological justice movements. I investigate the issue of language further in terms of how it is a factor in feelings of alienation amongst activist others organizing around similar social and environmental issues (eg. food security, ecological justice, social justice).

In *TG Gets Stuck*, I discuss how language is salient for TG in terms of stagnancy or stuckness in conflict resolution and community outreach situations. I explore the contribution of the TG narrative of "doing more of what we're already doing" as a means of tackling stuckness and examine how this narrative could be caused partially by a general lack of awareness of the feelings of exclusion felt by activist others. I also delve into how it could be problematic if the binary categories that are being used to guide "what we're already doing" are not reflexive about existing community-based power dynamics (such high levels of segregation) and other structures of oppression. I link this to the fact that TG's collaboration with social movements and their initiatives for increasing demographic diversity and inclusivity remain at superficial levels at this time.

Lastly, in *Focus Group Reflections and Materials*, I explore the results of a focus group session in which I presented a few quotes from research participants who feel excluded from TG, and encouraged core TG participants to discuss them. I found that when given the opportunity, those deeply engaged in TG are eager to participate in deep reflection on

the topics of privilege and alienation, and are also willing to discuss shifting the focus of their actions on the ground. This suggests a commitment to making TG more inclusive if they are given the tools to do so. I also display some artwork that was part of a structured-art reflection activity I facilitated during the focus group, which helps illustrate participants' diverse attitudes towards the topic privilege.

4.2 Transition Equals: "A More Just Way of Living For Everybody"?

One of the first things that I attempted through my interviews was to get a general idea of the relationship between justice and transition. I asked participants if they could describe this relationship or lack thereof, if they thought that there wasn't a direct one. Every research participant felt that transition has a strong role to play in social justice. Among participants more deeply engaged with TG, there was a general discourse around "what transition does" being something that helps communities move towards a more just world. However, there was not a strong emphasis on engaging with *specific* ways of bettering *specific* relationships of privilege and oppression between *specific* groups, *specifically* in Guelph - which is the level at which TG operates and can create tangible change. For example, Margaret a key organizer in TG stated:

I think [social justice] hugely relates [to transition] [...] climate change is affecting people who are least resourced to adapt around the world and that trend is gonna continue, so people who are already disadvantaged in many ways are the ones who often bear the brunt of the disasters that will come with changing climate: food shortages, losing access to land [...] people are being bought out of their land in *places in the world* so that richer countries can secure that agricultural land for their own production and horrible decades-long wars in countries that are rich in resources that feed everything that *industrialized society uses to live on*, including me... *I implicate all of us in that*. And all the way to resource questions and access to fair and just ways of living in this country [...] Canada has some of the worst examples of injustice and a lot of it is connected with industrialized society and *the transition that we're all wanting to make* is toward a different model that would still have some industry and technology of course but won't be based on an extractive model where people have to be kept in poverty in order to provide a cheap labour pool and those kinds of ideas, so that there would be *a more just way of living for everybody*.
(emphasis added by author)

To me, this quote shows that Margaret is aware of social and environmental justice issues at an international and national level and defines the relationship between transition and justice at that level as well. She shows an awareness of how her privilege is directly

related to the oppression of people located in "places in the world" and also recognizes a shared responsibility for that oppression when she says: "I implicate all of us in that". Through the context it's clear that by "all of us" she means "industrialized society", and so is perhaps less reflexive about the fact that not "all of us" in industrialized society play an equal part in terms of determining what "industrial society uses to live on".

I found a stark contrast to this language when I compared Margaret's interview to that of another research participant and justice organizer who works mainly outside of TG, Dalia, who conceptualizes social justice as relating to her work in the following way:

So, in this moment social justice to me is about understanding how systems of privilege and oppression work, situating myself within them, and working to change them even if it means that I will be experiencing harm along the way, and harm could mean state punishment, it could mean police violence, it could mean *I have less privilege*. It means *I could have less access to things that I was raised with* that seem to be normal or appropriate for someone to want and also it could mean *giving up on things* that are not necessary but are desirable. (emphasis added by author)

The main difference here is that on the one hand, Margaret seems to implicate, yet at the same time distance herself from social justice issues by referring to problems that are present at a global or national scale. Dalia, on the other hand, very much relates social justice to her person in a physical way, for example noting that a result of her working towards social justice: "could mean I have less privilege" or "less access to things that I was raised with". She thus shifts the conversation from activism as something that creates more justice for everyone, to social justice as something that may create less privilege for herself.

I believe this difference in perspectives lies in the fact that the kind of organizing that Dalia does places her physically at the front lines of certain activisms - front lines generally occupied by marginalized or non-dominant social groups who already lack in some of the privileges that are afforded to others. On the other hand, Margaret's activism occurs within a more privileged arena, in which projects are undertaken in a more comfortable space and are more removed from the front lines where privilege might be jeopardized.

The contrast between these two statements could perhaps be illuminated by the following statement by Blaine, an animal rights and social justice activist who had attended a few TG meetings in the past but became disenchanted with the organization. He categorized the transition movement under the term "mainstream movements" - something that most other justice activists who work outside of TG also did during my interviews. Through the interview, it became clear that he uses the term for movements generally lead by people with more intersecting categories of privilege or made up of dominant social groups, which are more widely accepted by the "mainstream"⁸:

[...] mainstream movements organize around developing skills, theory and discourse that reject a certain oppression/privilege and/or oppose a specific problem, but all the while ignoring the multitude of other privileges that these same activists retain at the expense of others and ignoring the ways in which these other ignored problems interact and intersect with the very oppression that they are coming together to oppose.

Combining this quote with those above, there could be a message emerging here, that while a recognition of large scale problems of oppression/privilege and discourses around justice is certainly important, it is only one step in terms of the possibilities for reflection about personal privilege - reflection which needs to inform how we conceptualize, approach and do activism on the ground in our communities.

4.3 Binary Language and Othering

One of the first interview questions that I would ask my interviewees, was: what *is* the transition movement to you? Almost every time, I got a response that contained binaries that act as guides, helping research participants situate transition amongst other social and environmental movements. Lisa, who is a frequent volunteer in TG said:

The transition movement to me embodies a movement where people can come forward with their own talents and say: "I am excited about building a resilient community, I am concerned about peak oil and climate change and I want to make a difference... and I'm coming at it from a perspective of *love and action rather than anger and protest*.

⁸

He did not give any additional examples of "mainstream movements".

I didn't realize the extent to which these binaries were present until I read over all of my interview transcripts in one go. Re-reading Lisa's interview, I was drawn to the fact that she created a division between "love"/"action" and "anger"/"protest" to delineate what transition is and what it isn't. Similarly, Anna, another TG frequent volunteer stated:

*The idea of [transition] is starting stuff, so that's different from what you'd consider other activist groups often doing [...] I think that it ties into what Joanna Macy⁹ talks about: that there are 'holding actions' and there are 'new initiatives' and TG largely roots itself in the new initiatives thing. It's really not about stopping, and holding actions are about stopping, and I think often when people use the term 'activist' that's what they mean. It's like *opposing* and like she said, that is really important. There are some things that we imminently need to stop so that's really important work... and it can't be the only thing. [...] And I think the other part of that is that it often gets focused on the anger that we feel and getting stuck in that. (emphasis added by author)*

Anna's words are clearly corroborated by the official TG activism discourse on their website, which under the "About Us" heading states:

Our primary focus is not campaigning against things, but rather on positive, empowering possibilities and opportunities. The generation of new stories and myths are central to this visioning work, as is the building of constructive alternatives to "business as usual". (Transition Guelph 2013a) (emphasis added by author)

Here again, there is a clear binary made between what Transition is and isn't. It is: "new initiatives"/"starting stuff"/"making progress"/"empowering"/"positive" and it is *not*: "stopping"/"holding actions"/"opposing"/"anger"/"other activist groups"/"campaigning against things". This brings to mind Alloun and Alexander's (2014) cautionary critique of the transition movement - specifically, the stress they place on the importance of fostering activism that focuses on inclusivity *without* "othering" (2014, 8).

I found that these binaries were also present when those heavily involved in TG spoke about neighbourhoods or groups of people that are not currently being represented in TG. For instance, when I asked Karl - a core TG volunteer - to describe some of the reasons why he thought that some demographics were not present. He said that it had to do with:

⁹ Joanna Macy is an eco-philosopher whose development of "The Work That Reconnects" has been the basis of a lot of the guiding principles behind community building and visioning in Transition.

[...] reasons of transportation - so ease of getting to *those places* - or in my situation, comfort with working with *those certain demographics* - we're being held back, I'm being held back for those reasons [...] In terms of our involvement in *their actions*, we haven't had the capacity to go and do that beyond creating a booth at *their event*, or providing support in a type of event that we both see eye to eye, but many of our members do work with *those communities*. (emphasis added by author)

Earlier, Karl had mentioned a few specific community groups, such as high school-aged youth, youth at risk, university students, and newcomers to Guelph as being underrepresented in TG; however, when answering the question of whether or not he felt that people might be left out of participating in TG for reasons beyond their control he spoke about "those places"/"those certain demographics"/"their event" without specific reference to which groups he was referring to within his answer and stating two reasons: lack of capacity and personal discomfort as reasons for not being able to reach "those communities", thus creating a clear "us" and "them" binary.

Such binaries, though they may be used innocently, contrast with the fact that the transition movement is predicated upon the idea of *whole communities* transitioning, often in the form of Transition Towns made up of several neighbourhoods that collaborate in the endeavour (Hopkins 2008a). Another TG member, Stephanie admits that "there's more that we could do to just let [Guelph's] population know, the people who may be coming into some new exposure to TG to let them know that this is *not* a club, this is everybody", thus reaffirming the awareness of a lack of diversity in TG as well as awareness of a need to act on this.

I should note however, that although here I am exploring the harmful effects of binary language specifically in TG, according to some research participants, the issue of binaries is certainly *not* restricted to TG but has a broader reach across social justice movements. Dalia, a justice activist who collaborates with TG, recognizes that adherence to binaries is something that characterizes the social justice movement in general:

For me I think one of the most important things about social justice is diversity of tactics and I think one of the most harmful things that has come out of the social

justice movement is a binary around violence and non-violence and good activism and bad activism, in that I think to create any real meaningful change we need to have a really massive spectrum of people putting energy in in really different ways.

A few other justice activists made similar reflections, so I think that this echoes a broader discussion that needs to be had across all activist groups in terms of critically reflecting on binaries, what and *whose* purpose they serve and where they come from. Dalia noted, for example that, "I think that no real movement got anywhere without violent action, whatever the fuck that means, because violence and non-violence is defined by the state and not by people." Here, she is calling for a debunking of the power structures that inform many of the binaries that we (especially "we", who hold a lot of privilege) take for granted, and emphasizing the importance of actively questioning them as a jumping off point for redefining them.

4.4 Binaries, Alienation, and Privilege

Those research participants who focus directly on oppressed or marginalized communities in their work outside of their ties to TG, report that TG often excludes them to some degree through passive alienation or unintended discrimination. These research participants quite often link this alienation to the aforementioned binaries, especially the emphasis on "positive" or "solution-oriented" actions vs. "holding actions" and "protest" organizing.

On one end of the alienation spectrum there are some activists participating in TG events being directly told by event organizers to change the angle of their language. Dalia¹⁰, who organizes on social and ecological fronts outside of TG commented: "if we're asked to booth at [a] TG event, we're asked like: 'Ok, you are anti-[this and that], what are you pro? Talking about sustainable energy?'" I think there is certainly something to reflect on here in terms of *whose voice gets heard* when a group with people, who generally hold more areas of intersecting privilege than another, asks the first to curb their language in collaborative situations. On the other end is the lack of engagement on the part of TG in

¹⁰ I realize that in my analysis I take many quotes from Dalia. The reason for this is that in her interview she was able to clearly articulate and summarize a lot the same attitudes I found emerging in other justice activist research participant interviews.

regards to either not inviting some individuals or groups to participate in events and meetings, or not responding to requests for collaboration. One social justice activist, Laura, became disenchanted with TG organizing after attending various meetings. I asked why she no longer attends meetings and she said:

I would get really frustrated because as an organizer¹¹ [...] I would post things [on the TG Facebook page]... people wouldn't show up, people didn't care - I don't know what it was but it was like "this does not affect me", so [...] if you're only looking at yourself then that's a really privileged viewpoint. And also to just take that challenge of like: "wow, this *doesn't* affect me" - and what does that *mean*? [...] I also e-mailed them a few times being like: "we should network in the community", and I think that people thought that we were too radical. [...] I think their non-response was like: "we don't like the way you're organizing", basically.

Laura's quote illustrates the unintended or passive elements of alienation that are felt by some. Similarly, Dylan, who works on food justice issues, attends TG sponsored events and has collaborated on some TG projects in the past said: "Just yesterday, there was a meeting [co-hosted by TG] [...] and they know [my organization] exists - why didn't they communicate with us?" As the interview went on and I asked what he thinks might be causing this passive exclusion; he mentioned that he ties it to "a judgement of poverty". He explained:

I know a lot of very, very, very smart underprivileged people in Guelph who belong in that type of a movement. They told me too. But they're not there. And I think the reason why is that they're either not invited and not included and there's no effort to include them, but also that for them to be dropped in that environment they'd feel pretty alienated, a lot of them.

Dylan brings into the conversation the fact that even when people representing underprivileged social groups are invited to participate in TG events, simply being around the "positivity" discourse that people who live with more privileges can "afford", can feel uncomfortable. Laura also articulated this feeling:

I often found that just the way people talked was very like - you talk in these *really nice ways where everything is always really nice and you have these really nice*

¹¹ Laura organizes on several social justice fronts. A lot of her organizing does have to do with things like protests and rallies, but also with education, workshops, and talks.

potlucks and you go to these really nice shows and all these things I started noticing, were very strange to me, this culture.... thinking a lot about colonialism and then being like: this is like colonialism, like "if you don't talk how I talk or go about changing the world in this very specific way then it's not the right way". And then when that way is made up of mostly white people, well then that's extremely scary. (emphasis added by author)

Laura mentioned to me that she identifies as "not white", "not straight" and "affected by displacement", which is likely part of the reason that she brings up links to colonialism. She analyzes language as a tool of cultural imperialism to impose dominant cultural norms on racialized/displaced minorities. This brings up an important point: if language is a tool of cultural imperialism, then paying attention to the effects of language in movements working on social and environmental justice is a must.

Indeed, many of those who organize outside of TG find that it's TG's very emphasis on strictly "positive", or in Laura's case "nice", actions that makes them feel alienated. As Laura mentioned above, they specifically feel that in TG's case "positive" becomes entangled in privilege when it is embodied by organizing that does not reflect on existing structures of oppression, such as colonialism, which are actually being reproduced through a focus on "positive" actions that exclude or undervalue other actions often undertaken by marginalized or non-dominant communities or groups of people.

Another example was brought up in my interview with Dalia. I asked her about the relationship between her organization and TG and as part of her answer, she described a collaborative event to which TG sent a [white, male, middle aged] speaker who ended his presentation with the Sanskrit salutation "Namaste". The term means: "I bow to the divine in you" and its use has gained popularity in western cultures, for instance as a salutation at the end of a yoga class or meditation. She says:

I felt my whole body stiffen when he said "Namaste" to this group, 'cause a lot of people in the room were racialized and a particular couple of my friends there are South Asian folks and I just was like: "oh god, don't yell at him, don't yell at him!"... not that they would but... it's tough because I also feel like we need to have challenging conversations and push our community members to do better and challenge when fucked up shit happens.

When she expanded on what she meant by "fucked up shit" she referred to cultural appropriation and acknowledging not only what belongs to whom culturally, but that the *main reason* that we have access to certain teachings and practices is because of colonialism and violent oppression and we absolutely need to confront this, even though it may cause discomfort.

One example to shed more light on the issue of privileged language, which through a focus on the "positive" leaves little room for critical reflection, came for me through a combination of interviews, informal chats with TG volunteers, following TG Facebook and website posts and attending events. I found in general that TG focuses a lot on First Nations-inspired practices in their healing, musical, and sharing practices. In the events that I attended this was done with reverence, and often with reference to specific Indigenous peoples of the area such as the Attawandaron and Anishnaabe peoples. Still, issues of politics and privilege were generally *not* brought up past acknowledging Indigenous stewardship of the land. I almost began to fear that this practice could become something that, having become a tradition in itself, might lose the deep reflexive aspect in terms of the colonialism and violence that Dalia talks about if awareness of these issues is not made explicit.

I too participated in this tradition when I presented two workshops on alternative currencies that were supported financially by TG. I struggled with tying this topic into my presentation which describes how a community currency set up in Vancouver functions. I finally settled on situating my talk in activism that is aware of systemic oppression, saying:

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the Indigenous stewards of this land and their ancestors. I think this is especially important for those of us interested in transition and concerned about things like climate change, climate justice and social justice in general to keep in mind that those communities who have suffered the most as a result of a socio-economic system that has a foundation in colonialism and environmental degradation, should be at the forefront of receiving the benefits of any movement that aims to move away from such practices. (taken from presentation notes)

To be honest, I'm not sure what some of the other activists I interviewed would say about

this. Is it enough? Reflecting on this experience, I realize that I certainly aimed to fit into the "positive" frame of language that TG uses in my presentation, while still bringing up issues like colonialism and oppression. These experiences made me realize how difficult (and colonial) it can be to speak about these issues without enough experience in that area and/or without trained anti-oppression facilitators, many of whom at least in Guelph, belong to minority or non-dominant groups. I explore possible ways to approach this issue in my discussion on coalition politics.

4.5 TG Gets Stuck

Most interviewees and later, focus group participants, touched on issues of stagnation or "being stuck" within TG. Through my research I came to understand that stuckness operates on several levels in relation to TG, from working group dynamics all the way to TG's relationship with other activist groups. Without being asked specifically about this topic, Lisa, a frequent TG volunteer, said:

There's a lot of compartmentalization that happens among all the different working groups and I think there's a lot of butting heads right now and a lot of friction - I was gonna say... jaggedness - and a lot of issues aren't talked about [...] I think people think it's maybe better just not to because it's a *progressive* movement and *they want to talk about the good things, about how we can be cheerleaders and keep everything moving, keep the momentum happening*, but if those underlying conflicts aren't discussed then it festers, right? (emphasis added by author)

Here Lisa relates TG's stuckness directly to its strict focus on: being "progressive", "good things", and being "cheerleaders", all of which tie in thematically with the kinds of binaries explored earlier in terms of what is deemed "positive" and "solution-oriented".

I found that this "stuckness" is also something that prevents TG from becoming more welcoming to newcomers. Research participants during the focus group¹² I held after all of the interviews were completed, were asked to reflect in pairs on a quote by an interviewee, Clara, who expressed feeling unwelcome as part of a planning committee for

¹² Although I zoom in specifically on the focus group data in a subsequent section of my analysis, I feel that the following material shows some very interesting reflections on stuckness, which I think fit with the theme of the current section. The section specifically about the focus group talks more about reflection on privilege in general and about TG members talking about what a shift in focus in TG might mean and look like for them.

the organization's annual Resilience Festival. Below is an excerpt from the original quote, which was quite lengthy:

When I quit my job and decided to plug in more into Guelph, one of the things I did was start going to TG meetings. I tried to get involved but... I don't look like a hippy as much as other people in that group do, or speak like a hippy and while I have a lot of the same values, I think that's just human nature - you just zoom in on: "ok, that person more or less looks like me, looks like they have the same ideas as me, I'm gonna bunch up with that" and that's a problem everywhere, not just in TG. So I didn't feel overly welcome, personally. And so for me, that was sort of my experience. I think it's just about being welcoming and knowing your own prejudice and [...] I think everybody just wants to be loved and accepted and so you're gonna go to the group that you're pretty sure will love and accept you the most.

The focus group participants discussed this and commented via written notes:

Transition gets stuck because this [referring to the story in the quote] is very common. Within a working group, there are disagreements, conflicts etc. We kind of lack the drive/ability to work through these. Instead the process just stops because one doesn't like another or other conflicts come up.

Or: it's *counter-cultural* to work through these or even to speak the need for embracing the process within a group. (emphasis added by author)

Transition gets stuck because we are constrained in the way we think things are supposed to go. People get identified with what they're doing. In order for [different] things to happen, sometimes you need to give it space. We're still after the result, not the process.

In conversation, they again referred to it being "counter-cultural" to address issues of tension and stagnation. I would thus argue that TG's binary language has become part of a culture that stands behind the binaries that define what it does and does not do, and that one of the results of this culture is a kind of "stuckness" in terms of conflict resolution and fostering diversity through being welcoming to different kinds of people. The above was the beginning of a deeper reflection among core TG members at the focus group; I expand on that reflection in the next section of my analysis.

When interviewees were asked about building more diversity in TG or whether or not they thought that TG needed to change the way it operates, I found that during the interview process, core members often had ideas along the lines of "doing more of what

we are already doing" in terms of "positive" and "solutions" rather than unpacking what this means and perhaps changing course in some aspects. For instance, Margaret commented on what she feels needs to be done to get TG moving saying: "I don't know about change something as in stop what we're doing and do it differently, but maybe change in the sense of do what we already are doing more powerfully and more". She then went on to list activities such as volunteer engagement, inclusion of paid staff, and awareness-raising through engaging with "visions of what's possible" and "the need for transition" for those communities where people with less privilege feel disempowered to tackle big issues. She ended with:

[...] if we can get in front of their eyes and surrounding them - a welcoming community who can help them feel welcomed and resourced, to see ways they can make a contribution that can fit their lives, I think *so* many people would love to have something meaningful to do, so I want more of that.

Along a similar line of thinking, Karl, a core TG organizer, saw the need to make the movement even friendlier in terms of expanding existing outreach stating:

We are looking at youth involvement - young youth like in schools; how to get the university more involved because there are people there that want to see this happen...we just need to grow our capacity to be able to do that [...] and we realize that we haven't touched those communities, *we've stayed in a fairly comfortable bubble in the downtown area.* (emphasis added by author)

I realized that there is perhaps a paradox emerging in which TG often expects to increase participant diversity by doing more of what it's doing, when some parts of what it's doing are the very things that foster stagnation.

The word "bubble" came up several times during the interview portion of my research. Karl, for instance, refers to TG staying within a comfortable "downtown bubble", which alludes to the spatial and social segregation I too observed. In fact, this phenomenon defines much of Guelph and certainly has a role to play in the challenges that TG faces in terms of building diversity and overcoming stuckness. Generalizing greatly, this refers to a predominantly white, middle class community that lives in the downtown and some surrounding suburban areas; a young, student and activist-rich university area; and new

immigrant and low-income neighbourhoods poorly communicated with other areas of Guelph. The first two areas mentioned often bleed into one another as students stream into the downtown area on evenings and weekends during the school year, or come up for specific events. Conversely, people from the downtown areas can be seen at the university for events and symposia. In the downtown core, there is also a very visible presence of a minority of people living in poverty, some on social assistance and a few dealing with homelessness; these individuals generally congregate in one square that has proximity to soup kitchens and shelters. Only the mainly white, middle class, downtown community is heavily represented in TG.

While the bubble metaphor is certainly strongly tied to segregation, other research participants, also brought in the bubble image to refer more to the attitudes of TG. Here, Laura describes how she felt when TG did not engage with her attempts to foster collaboration:

I feel like what frustrated me was that people wanted these things, and wanted to challenge these things [oppressive structures], but then when it gets too hard, they're like "well, I'm just gonna stay in this bubble and I'm not gonna confront this privilege and I'm not gonna feel uncomfortable and I'm not gonna take any risks and I'm not gonna challenge myself".

Above, Laura alludes to the fact that instead of confronting the lack of diversity and social segregation through reflection, TG has largely, though not exclusively, existed not only in a comfortable, spatial, downtown "bubble", but similarly, in a comfortable language and praxis "bubble", which in this case can be defined as an intersection of class, race, place, and education level. I realize that this list is limiting and that there are other intersections of relevance in TG that affect balances of power both internally and in terms of relationships with other organizations. In this thesis, I am focusing in on those intersections that I have detected as being most salient when studying language and justice. There are other intersections, such as age and sexual orientation, which could be analyzed in further research in terms of subtler/other power imbalances at work.

Through interviews and informal conversations, I found out that while there *is* evidence that the "bubble" trend has begun to shift as various TG "feelers" (initiatives aimed at establishing new relationships through conversations, e-mails, research) are going out into other neighbourhoods and demographics, much of TG's organizing around increasing diversity of involvement remains either in idea stage or at superficial levels at this time. By "superficial" I mean that different organizations might be collaborators more in the financial rather than the knowledge-exchange sense (as sponsors of events for example); they maybe be asked to hold booths at TG events, and vice versa, or send potential volunteers each other's way. While those actors more heavily engaged in TG link reasons for this to stagnation in terms of conflict resolution, lack of capacity and financial resources, Dalia reminded me matter-of-factly that: "you don't need tons of money to create entry points into different groups, right?"

Karl says that TG places importance on:

[...] getting to know our local environment, our local selves, our local neighbours so that we can become interdependent with those skills, and love each other and support each other in whatever is to come in the future, whether really happy or really destructive and sad and all in between.

Through this quote, as well as through every single interview and conversation, I got the clear message that TG has a deep and honest intention of building strong, mutually beneficial relationships with local organizations in order to:

[...] create a richer, more vibrant community through the re-localization of the services and resources that we need in order to survive and thrive in a world of long-term energy cost increases, climate change, and growing instability in the world economy. (Transition Guelph 2013b)

Given the above discussions, one key point in TG's strategy might therefore be to look at bursting their comfort bubble both physically and mentally in order to achieve their goals of becoming "interdependent" with "local neighbours" successfully, meaningfully, and over the long term.

4.6 Focus Group Reflections and Materials

The first part of the focus group centered on the collective co-creation of 7 art pieces after an introduction to my thesis work for those who had not heard about it before. The point behind the art activity was to guide the participants in a reflection about the connections between transition and justice through the creation of an artistic landscape. First, I asked the participants to draw several elements on each paper (which was passed to the right after each step to avoid artistic shyness) that had them reflect on how transition has shaped their lives. For example, I had them draw a representation of themselves and then choose an animal to stand beside them and represent TG. In order to inspire the participants to reflect on how the justice aspect of transition relates to them, I decided that the focus of each art piece would be the 'tree of intersectionality', in which I asked the participants to draw a tree, with each of the branches symbolizing a privilege or non-privilege that they recognized in their lives. I told them that they could write keywords on the branches if they wished. Below are a few examples of what they drew/wrote (full artwork set available in Appendix B):





b)



c)

Text Reads:

Non-privileges: not dominant thinking, low \$, introvert, artist

Privileges: school, food plenty, 2 parents, shelter/cleanliness, opportunity/respect, Canada



In general, the focus group participants unanimously voiced a desire to reflect more and more deeply on the issue of intersectionality than they had been given time to do in the art activity. During the post-activity discussion, some of the participants noted that - as you can see in the first 2 examples above - their trees were bent over due to the realization/weight of their privilege, indicating that privilege can be seen as a burden. At the same time, the two bottom trees are relatively balanced between perceived privileges and non-privileges, one indicated by keywords, and the other artistically in that one side of the tree is devoid of leaves/fruit. In image *c*, some sources of privilege were clearly listed (belonging to a dominant/western society: "Canada", stable family life: "2 parents", education: "school", economic stability: "shelter/cleanliness" & "food plenty"), although a few were quite vague (opportunity/respect, low \$, artist) and many not directly present (race, religion, gender, ability, class, language, age).

Taking into account the above data, I would summarize this empirical material as being indicative of the fact that TG has not generally engaged in intersectional reflections on privilege and power to date, however, that they are also eager to do so. People reported feelings of realization of privilege that they had not had before and were trying to

understand where these come from. For example, the roots in the tree artwork reminded one participant of how your roots can create categories of privilege and it's worth it to ask how deep these might go, i.e. how ingrained they are in us; she related this to people of white, settler, northern European background (as this person and the majority of the focus group participants were).

At the same time, participants were also not sure how to proceed from their reflections, and generally expressed feeling uncomfortable and overwhelmed confronting some of the privileges present in their lives. This sentiment was also expressed through the following note a participant made in her notebook: "we try so hard to do the right thing, not realizing the painful impact we might cause". Other times they tried to downplay the ways in which they *do* belong to dominant social groups, which can be seen through the artwork. A lot of the time, however, the participants questioned the *very notion* of what privilege is through some of the notes they made in their notebooks, such one participant who asked: "*who* defines privilege?". This was also done through a verbal discussion they had about how certain circumstances can be seen as both privilege *and* non-privilege depending on your viewpoint, for example: being female (most participants were female).

In the second part of the focus group, I wished to engage the participants directly with some of the empirical material I had gathered to date and presented quotes from people who have felt alienated from TG. I asked the participants to pair up and discuss them while writing notes that they would hand in to me later. I provided some questions that I had prepared as guides for discussion (see Appendix C). The participants once again demonstrated a certain level of discomfort when discussing these once we regrouped after they had the chance to talk. However, they had several interesting reflections about what they called "an opening up" of TG as a response to feelings of alienation.

To exemplify this process, I have pasted below a passage that I asked them to reflect on (notes in green & highlights added physically by focus group participants), followed by participant reflections:

[words passed along to this interviewee from an Indigenous mentor]:

...[she said that] when you're living within oppression and even outside of that, some of the most important ways to connect to yourself and learn more about yourself is through action and through learning through others and through creating change and watching how you respond to that and actually connecting to what the work that is about. And so, specifically, grounding that work within connection to the earth [vitaly important!] - and within the spiritual practice, and how you can't separate those two things out and the generations of people before her have been teaching her about how inner transformation should be happening simultaneously with other kinds of transformation. And that it's a responsibility thing...

[more radical activist] people aren't interested [in engaging with TG] even though some of the work they're doing is fairly connected or at least could be. I feel like there could be some really cool ways to complicate the conversation about backyard gardening with conversations around gentrification and what does that look like? And talk about how we contribute to gentrification in our communities...

On the same page I had written the following question, which is followed by their written response:

What kinds of relationships should exist between transition movements and other movements? How "entangled" should they be?

The Transition Movement includes all the groups working towards The Great Turning¹³.

TG needs to support the more "specialized" movements + holding action movements.

Will it [the above engagement with other groups] impair the [existing TG] projects?

Garden in low-income area of Guelph = building relationships.

This would shift the focus/slow down [TG's] progress.

The participants' written response shows both eagerness and ambivalence towards collaboration. On the one hand they understand the need to build relationships with other activist groups who may engage in "holding actions". On the other, they fear that "this would shift the focus/slow down progress" on some of the projects that TG is working on.

Once we gathered as a group for the last discussion, we talked more about how an "opening up" to new forms of collaboration might happen in TG. Several participants

¹³

The Great Turning refers to a shift in consciousness and human behaviour towards a more sustainable way of being on the Earth, as described by Joanna Macy, an eco-philosopher whose work is largely influential in the transition movement.

elaborated on the "shift in focus" that new forms of collaboration might foster in TG and generally agreed on the fact that such a shift would not necessarily be a bad thing. Below is an excerpt from my field journal reflection about this discussion:

[TG] members [...] discussed that an "opening up" of TG could actually lead to more empathy and therefore more resilience, as well stressing the importance of the *process* of transition, not just the outcome (i.e. thriving, self-sufficient post-carbon communities - being the main focus at this time). Several ideas were passed around in terms of facilitating this "opening up" and a lot of them centered on incorporating trained facilitators or therapists into each event and working group. This immediately made me think of some of my [justice activist] interviewees who had mentioned that if a movement was interested in opening up and diversifying, then it would need to incorporate facilitators of colour, of varied [places along the] gender [spectrum], and from diverse cultural backgrounds. At this point, people needed to go home, so we wrapped up the conversation.

The focus group ended with a general atmosphere of eagerness to continue the conversation about unpacking privilege and envisioning collaborative strategies for TG.

In an effort to further contribute to these conversations about language, privilege, and collaboration as an academic, I base the rest of this thesis in theoretical discussion. In the first section I elaborate a discussion about feminist epistemologies and how they help deconstruct the use of binaries. I then talk about strategies for overcoming 'privilege fragility' - a term that encapsulates some of the challenges people face when confronted with privilege. Finally, I wrap up with a concluding discussion about how the various concepts associated with collaborative activism might help guide TG's approach to collaborating with activist groups who approach justice from different perspectives.

5.0 Theoretical Discussions

5.1 Reflection: When A Group Of People Create a Language

Educational feminist author Barbara Thayer-Bacon (2010) suggests that "we can never remove the quotation marks from around "knowledge" and "reality" (133) - in other words that epistemology cannot be transcendental; it cannot grant us access to any so-called "universal truths". In this short discussion, I would like to outline a kind of epistemological reflection that TG can undertake as an organization in order to navigate

its use of language towards promoting justice and addressing alienation. I do this by touching on where and when binary-type language is rooted and then exploring how the limits of binaries might be pushed using feminist epistemological theory elaborated by Thayer-Bacon (2010), who's makes the following relevant reflection on language:

Language is used to classify and clarify. Our terms help us separate and straighten out our ideas. We use words to differentiate and distinguish, and what I am trying to do here is bring things together. I want to emphasize how things overlap, associate, integrate, refer, compare, connect, *relate* to each other, and in that relating, how things affect each other, and change each other. (149)

The above statement illustrates the central aim of this theoretical discussion, because it makes a bridge between two important functions of language: to separate knowledge and to relate knowledge. While I think it is very important to distinguish the different approaches with which we can address global crises such as climate change and peak oil, I believe it is equally important to find a common ground that does not alienate amongst these approaches.

Thayer-Bacon (2010) further notes: "we must confront Epistemology¹⁴, and deconstruct it, so that we can dissolve the dualisms it creates and move on. These dualisms include for example: absolute/relative, subjective/objective, mind/body, knower/known" (134). These and other dualisms have followed us, shaping rationalistic worldviews from Descartes (eg. mind/body; nature/culture) through Talcott-Pearsons (eg. collective orientation/self orientation) and they are not easily dismantled (Plumwood 2002). Ecofeminist Val Plumwood argues that binaries such as "culture/nature" and "reason/emotion" help the dominant culture define itself and have infiltrated our knowledge, political structures, and worldviews. She also ties privilege into dualism discourse by stating that "dualism and rationalism function together as a system of ideas that justifies and naturalises domination of people and events by a privileged class identified with reason, who deserve to be in control and to be disproportionately

¹⁴ Thayer-Bacon (2010) uses the term Epistemology with a capital 'E' when she refers to epistemology "in the traditional philosophical sense, with an assumption of absolutism" (133).

rewarded" (17). If this is so, then organizations such as TG, which are made up of privileged or dominant social groups looking for more just ways of living on the Earth need to be very careful when engaging binaries to guide what they do and do not do, and how they conceptualize justice.

I would encourage TG to reflect deeply upon the separation they create between "holding actions" and "new initiatives" or "positive solutions" and "anger"/"protest" and perhaps take time to do an analysis of how these distinctions might be tangled up in privilege - for example the fact that "holding actions" are generally carried out against initiatives that do *not* affect many TG members personally or directly, but which *do* directly affect those who stand against them. One example of this could be rallies to protest industrial development complexes, which are often built close to, and have direct negative health effects on marginalized communities in the area, or protests against government legislation that would disproportionately affect marginalized people. This analysis can be part of a deeper question of when and *how* and *who* do binaries serve and when/how do they hinder some of TG own aims as part of the transition movement, which puts emphasis on the bridging and bringing together of diverse types of knowledge (Hopkins 2006), and on the belief that: "relationships are primary; building and tending them, we create the better life we want" (Ludwig 2015).

Another point I would like to make is that while many of the binaries present in TG justice discourse originate in primary transition movement literature (eg. Hopkins 2008), I think that examining how these might manifest in the specific TG context, given its cultural, ecological, economic, and political contexts is necessary. I believe that "doing more of what we are already doing" can and should be approached tentatively and with a responsibility to others who may, in privileged spheres, remain unseen in the Guelph community. I think that this responsibility can be approached through epistemological reflexivity in terms of how TG sees itself as part of a larger gestalt - that is something larger and more meaningful than the sum of its parts but which also influences each part that makes it up. I am referring now to a gestalt of justice-oriented movements in Guelph that work to tackle issues such as injustice, climate change and peak resource use.

Diehm (2002) wraps Naess's gestalt ontology in feminist epistemological concerns and writes:

Here, identification¹⁵ would be understood as a response, just one mode of an ongoing dialogue in which we attempt to find ways to articulate ourselves properly to others, a way of recognizing and assuming responsibility, of being responsive. Viewing difference in this way would mean, moreover, that we would always be questioned further by differences that interrogate the adequacy of our responses, that we would always be called to listen for ways to re-position ourselves in relationships. And how we respond, and how we listen, would be the deepest expressions of who we are. (34)

This line of thinking can be instrumental in helping TG individuals and TG as an organization and movement reflect on the effects of its language in terms of responsibility to other Guelph community members; allowing themselves to always be "questioned further by differences that interrogate the adequacy of our responses". From what I have gathered, a language-based "repositioning" could be an opportunity for TG to create deeper bonds with other forms of activism in ways that furthers the causes of all involved.

This repositioning might not necessarily take the form of a dismantling of binaries - something that is too great to be tacked in theory, let alone in practice. The first step in this process would, in my opinion, be centered once again in Thayer-Bacon's (2010) approach of looking to "overlap, associate, integrate, refer, compare, connect, *relate* to each other, and in that relating, [understand how] how things affect each other, and change each other" (149). It could take the form of TG asking how two parts a given binary overlap. This might be done through a questioning of: whether it has to be "either or"; asking if "holding actions" and "new initiatives" can or should be tackled by separate groups of people who feel alienated from each other; whether binaries can be seen instead

¹⁵ Here, identification means broadly speaking: "a sense of commonality with other entities" (Fox 1995 in Diehm 2002, 25) or a recognition of parts of the self in the other. However, Diehm notes that identification also has the capability to "spiral inward" and recognize/identify with "the particularities of th[e] self" (25).

of two separate elements as one whole, towards which different perspectives are useful or even indispensable. Lastly, I would like to point out that this kind of reflection might also be useful to other organizations struggling with similar issues; certainly, given its rootedness in western culture, binary language is not unique to TG or even to mainstream environmental movements.

5.2 Education: The Importance of Recognizing and Working Through 'Privilege Fragility'

As illustrated in my data analysis, some of the core TG research participants as well as myself, bumped up against our privilege during the creation of this thesis in a way that caused discomfort. For me, it was through personal reflection after interviews and events I attended. For the core TG research participants, it happened during interviews and during the focus group activity when they were shown some of the quotes I gathered from people who have felt alienated from TG. Based on my research, I have found that feelings discomfort, defensiveness, and guilt that stem from this experience are not uncommon, and can be recognized and worked through (Diangelo 2011, Goodman 2011). I have decided to term this response 'privilege fragility' to highlight the sensitivity and vulnerability of those who experience it. To explore this concept, I take inspiration firstly from Gil Valentine's (2008) work about meaningful social interactions or "politics of connectivity" between segregated social groups. Secondly, I draw on the concept of 'white fragility' used by Robin Diangelo (2011), who refers to the moment when white people, who have lived in an "insulated environment" that reinforced the 'normalcy' of their privilege, are confronted with racial stress (54). Finally, I look to work by Diane J. Goodman (2011, 2000) about educating privileged groups about social justice - ending with a few suggestions as to how TG might start to think about engaging in this kind of education.

First, I would like to say a few words about how 'privilege fragility' manifests in TG and in myself. It was after re-listening to all of my interviews and thinking back on my conversations with people that I realized that it exists mainly in subtle forms of communication. I detected it when I would ask research participants questions like "do

you think that any community members are being left out of participating in TG for reasons that are not within their control?" I remember sensing a tightening in the voices of a few interviewees and detecting discomfort when I asked this. I also remember feeling the same kind of tightening inside of me when some of the justice activists I spoke with would criticize TG or mainstream movements (of which I am and was a part) for not checking their privilege. The word "fragility" I think makes a lot of sense, because for me, it began with feelings of helplessness, fear, guilt and defensiveness, which made me feel emotionally vulnerable. I remember one TG member explicitly told me that she felt something very similar when I told her some of the themes that were emerging from my research. I would say that 'privilege fragility' is a diverse concept and manifested also when TG members showed ambivalence towards a change the focus of their actions; when they admitted their own discomfort with interacting with certain demographics; or when they ignored requests to collaborate from those who might approach issues differently.

To begin to investigate ways of dealing with 'privilege fragility', Valentine's "politics of connectivity" (2008) can be useful as it is a concept that relates to the challenges of generating meaningful intrapersonal exchange between members of socially segregated groups. She investigates the role of privilege in these situations, noting that "the anxiety of privilege" is often a factor in preventing meaningful social exchange: "[f]earful of being condescending or 'getting it wrong' and causing offence, [people holding more privilege] eschew encounters with difference (an option in part facilitated by their privilege) and in doing so produce the very effects of which they are fearful..." (84). Drawing on my empirical data, I am reminded for instance of Karl's exploration of his own "comfort with working with *those certain demographics*" and his confession that he is "being held back for those reasons". Similarly, a fear of "getting it wrong" was an undertone during the focus group, for instance when some participants noted: "we try so hard to do the right thing, not realizing the painful impact we might cause."

At the same time, however, Valentine (2008) cautions that: "inter-group contact – while potentially beneficial in reducing majority prejudice – can be very stressful for minority groups" (87) because sometimes privileged people who profess liberal values tend to

display "an uncomfortable gap" (ibid.) between these values and the practices they engage in. This reflection echoes the sentiments expressed by Dylan in the data analysis section in which he spoke about inclusion and exclusion of underprivileged groups in TG events, stating that even when invited to gatherings, these people would often feel uncomfortable being "dropped in that environment". This perhaps indicates that invitations or simply being together in a physical space are not enough to foster inclusion and dialogue, but that inclusion of non-dominant groups is a topic that merits a more thought-out approach.

One way to address 'privilege fragility' when engaging in any kind of planned social encounters might be to use what Valentine calls an "intersectionality of multiple identities" (87) or a recognition that different people, each with their own intersections along different majority/minority spectra may perceive the same encounter in many different ways with differing levels of anxiety, fear, alienation etc. She also writes that this intersectionality must be accompanied by an ethics of care and respect (ibid.). I think that an "intersectionality of multiple identities" might be useful for instance in framing the "opening up" that was discussed during the focus group activity, for instance creating reflection sessions after events or meetings during which people are encouraged to share how they perceived that event. Recording such narratives might fit into the mandate of the Narratives Working Group within TG who state on their webpage: "[i]n recent decades, it has become increasingly clear that the dominant stories of industrialized society are leading humanity down a destructive path. What other stories can we tell that will serve as better guides?" (Transition Guelph 2013c).

Diangelo (2011) explores a similar concept of discomfort that occurs when white people experience fear, guilt and defensiveness when confronted with racial stress. She notes that: "pointing out white advantage will often trigger patterns of confusion, defensiveness and righteous indignation" - or 'white fragility' (65). One key suggestion that she makes is the education of white people specifically about the issue of white racism. She notes that: "[w]hite people often believe that multicultural/anti-racist education is only necessary for those who interact with "minorities" or in "diverse" environments, [...] it is critical that all white people build the stamina to sustain conscious and explicit

engagement with race" (66). This supports what Valentine terms a "general lack of understanding [amongst privileged or dominant social groups] of diversity, difference and rights, as well as misunderstandings about resource allocations which have important implications for the work of equality bodies" (2008, 91). Diangelo also cautions that: "if we can't listen to or comprehend the perspectives of people of color, we cannot bridge cross-racial divides" (ibid.).

While the topic of 'privilege fragility' covers a broader privilege spectrum than 'white fragility', Adair and Howell (1988 in Goodman 2011, 9) suggest that: "[t]here are many similar dynamics, patterns, and themes across different forms of oppression". I therefore would argue - and a few justice activist research participants have suggested this as well - that anti-oppression training with facilitators who belong to minority groups is necessary for TG to bridge across privilege divides. In order to get past "immobilizing" levels of guilt and anxiety (Goodman 2000, 1065), Goodman (2011) offers several steps towards undertaking anti-oppression educational strategies for privileged groups. One of the first and most important steps she suggests is debunking assumptions about privilege, stating that "[m]any students resist the term 'privilege' because [...] they understand it colloquially to mean 'special'", when in activist and academic writing it simply refers to unearned advantages afforded to members of dominant social groups who perceive these advantages as "normal" (Goodman 2011 cited in Michael 2013, 224).

Further, she encourages students to move past abstracted discussions of privilege, which obscure existing and lived power dynamics (ibid. 224), stating that more concrete reflections need to be made based on the idea that: "[w]hen we're part of an advantaged group, our subordinated identities may mitigate but not eliminate our access to power and privilege just as additional privileged identities may enhance it" (Goodman 2011, 8). Goodman states that it can be helpful to have both a single and multiple identity focus in order to explore specific issues of power and dominance in our lives in a simplified way first and *then* to open up the lens to intersectional perspectives in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of it (8). The goal then, is to work towards educating people from privileged groups to foster a deep solidarity in which "endeavors [...] focus on equity and social change, not simply inclusion and tolerance" (Goodman 2000, 1061). I would

therefore suggest for TG more of the kinds of intersectional reflections along the lines of the “tree of intersectionality” that we explored in the focus group. Participants might be encouraged first of all to identify one or two areas of privilege that are most salient in their lives and then to draw more “branches” and ask: how each “branch” of privilege affords them more or less facility, how this manifests as part of their own identity, as well as how each “branch” informs the way they relate to other community members.

As an overall educational approach, Goodman proposes an education based on relational epistemology as elaborated by Sampson (1988 in Goodman 2000):

"When the self is defined in relation, inclusive of others in its very definition, there is no fully separate self whose interests do not of necessity include others" (p. 20). Work on behalf of others is simultaneously work on behalf of oneself. From this interdependent perspective, since our lives and fates are intertwined, social justice efforts are being done for our collective benefit. (1074)

Thus, when TG embarks on educational strategies, they need to investigate the use of binaries in terms of relationships and intertwined fates. As Goodman suggests: "[v]isualizations, drawing, writing, discussion, and list making can make these imaginings more concrete" (1078). TG already has a rich history of engaging in these kinds of activities, primarily through visioning and backcasting exercises, so there is already a steady jumping off point for work that engages with anti-oppression training and overcoming 'privilege fragility'. Consciously incorporating social and ecological justice themes into regular TG activities could be one step that might be taken at future events. Here I see what could be a re-working of “do more of what we’re already doing” as well as a more informed version of “a more just way of living for everybody”. TG and transition already have social and ecological justice concerns built into their foundations, however a conscious privilege perspective at events and meetings could be instrumental in guiding effective and collaborative actions based on these concerns.

In a critical article written by Cohen et al. (2013) - 5 educators who have passed through social justice education training courses - the authors further elaborate on the three core justice education principles: "examining theories for their potential to uncover or obscure lived experience; unpacking binary constructions of identity; and exploring the limits and

possibilities of intersectional thinking" (264). As the topic of binaries is relevant and problematic in TG's language, "unpacking binary constructions of identity" in terms of TG's own identity would be of special interest, especially given that "[t]he more others are seen as similar or sharing a close relationship, the less able one is to maintain the cognitive distortion to justify the status quo" (Goodman 2000, 1080-1). While these Cohen et al. center specifically on a social foundations course for university students, I don't think that such a rigid path would be necessary for TG to obtain social justice training that focuses on "how people live their lives and the ever-evolving ways they experience identity, power, and privilege" (Cohen et al. 2013). I think that the three core principles proposed by Cohen et. al. could be incorporated into self-study sessions or "intentional and systematic inquir[ies] into one's own practice" (ibid. 265) for TG facilitators, or into anti-oppression or justice trainings facilitated by members of organizations specifically dedicated to those ends. One key step in making that possible would be to create stronger bonds of solidarity with those groups. I expound this argument in the following section.

5.3 Collaboration: Bursting the Comfort Bubble and TG Towards Coalition Politics

Recently, feminist scholars have explored ways in which different activist organizations and actors can work together in solidarity while dealing with the politics of *knowing differently*, and thus navigating through both a "'politics of difference' and a 'politics of solidarity'" (Maiguashca 2005). I think these perspectives can be quite relevant to guiding TG's co-operation with different activisms since it struggles with achieving solidarity across difference and issues of power and privilege are salient.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) for instance explores "strategic coalitions across class, race, and national boundaries" to address "a shared sense of the need for a political front for effective intervention" in terms of intervening in hegemonic discourses (18) and counteracting tendencies towards reductive discourses in Western feminist activism and scholarship (20). An overarching look at my interview data suggests that TG can fall prey to reductionist discourses of resilience and sustainability quite easily due to the social

make-up of the organization and its resulting language - a situation in which 'strategic coalitions' with activists who do activism differently¹⁶ may be of benefit to both sides.

On the other hand, Mohanty (2003) retains the notion of "the necessity of forming strategic political identities and affinities" (333), which I believe is *equally* as important as forming coalitions. I would like to stress the fact that TG's identity as an organization and movement that promotes positive, community-based solutions is absolutely valid and necessary, and I certainly do not wish to suggest that it should steer away from this idea, which is its foundation, and is also the very reason why others wish to collaborate with it.

One caveat to 'strategic coalitions', which I think is important to consider, is the fact that sometimes knowledge creation across difference within coalitions is suspended in order to "hide dissent from the common enemy" (Maiguashca 2005, 215). This is essentially a sweeping under the rug of tensions and fundamental differences that might arise from different positions across power, race and privilege spectra. This process results in dominant voices being heard and "the discursive nature of knowledge" getting silenced (ibid.). I think that especially given TG's tendency of avoiding situations of tension and conflict resolution, this is something important to keep in mind. Bice Maiguashca stresses that knowledge claims have diverse sources, including reason, but also "empathy, compassion, tradition or spiritual insight" (217) and suggests that "[e]xploring the practices of social movements suggests that the question of how we know the world may require us to go beyond notions of reason altogether" (217). If we consider the Merriam-Webster definition of reason as being "the power of the mind to think and understand in a logical way" (Merriam-Webster online) and see reason as something that has been co-opted by hegemonic industrial rationality (Plumwood 2002), then Maiguashca's quote could be interpreted as a further argument to explore beyond a dichotomous rational categorization of "what we do" and "what we don't do" and think instead of "what can we do together?"

¹⁶ When I say: "do activism differently" I refer to diversity of tactics, social demographics/demographic representation, and of perspectives and approaches to activism. I am referring again to activists engaged in both "holding actions" and "new initiatives" as well as anything in between or a mix of the two.

The author advocates for 'connected knowing' which is largely centered on an empathetic perspective that takes into account experiences and emotions rather than goals or strategies; it provides a "supportive environment for open dialogue about a range of difficult and contentious issues" (Manguashca 2005, 218). One important element of 'connected knowing' is the idea of overcoming discomfort and entering a kind of willing suspension of disbelief or a "a deliberate imaginative extension of one's understanding into positions that initially feel wrong or remote" (Clinchy 1996 in Manguashca 2005, 218). I discussed the image and theme of the comfort "bubble" in my analysis and how it is salient in issues of alienation and stagnation in TG. At the same time, although this was not a common theme among core TG members, one TG volunteer I interviewed, Tara, did state a desire to actually move *towards* discomfort saying that: "whenever I realize that something is making me feel quite uncomfortable, it's really looking at that and probably moving towards it, [...] it's probably bringing up something juicy that I should be looking at". Similarly, another research participant, Dalia, whose main work was in justice activism outside of TG said: "If you feel too comfortable within your activism or within your social justice work then you have to completely re-evaluate what you're doing". Both research participants thus suggest that bursting the "bubble" is necessary for effective activism.

Giovanna Dichiro (2008) explores a similar line of thinking and writes on 'coalition politics'. She expounds ways in which the environmental movement was reborn as various different social and environmental justice movements who have found solidarity and strength in difference and in dialogue with one another. The author critiques the mainstream environmental movement by saying that:

Defining what counts as an environmental problem and what doesn't invites certain alliances and inhibits others, and the environmental movement has shot itself in the foot by adopting the definitional frontiers that delegate different issues as either inside or outside the environmental 'frame'. (279)

Dichiro's mention of "the environmental 'frame'" echoes some of the binaries that are inhibiting TG's collaboration with other organizations such as the focus on "us" and "them", which goes with "holding actions" vs. "new initiatives" or "solutions" vs. "protest". As discussed, these binaries delegate what transition does and does not do and therefore what kinds of activism are and are not compatible with TG. In order to overcome binary and limiting definitions of what a movement is and is not, Dichiro (2008) proposes instead what she terms 'coalition politics':

Coalition politics is [...] about articulation – the power-laden, non-innocent practices of interconnection, alliance-building, and 'joined-up thinking' (Agyeman et al. 2003). Articulation is produced by diverse social actors through engaging 'situated knowledges' about the world and creating new collective eco-political entities in the hopes of 'surviving together' (Haraway 1992, p. 311). (280)

The author echoes the 'connected knowing' of Maiguashca (2005) and the 'strategic coalitions' of Mohanty (2003) through her emphasis on knowledge as being situated, and produced by 'diverse social actors'. At the same time, 'coalition politics' introduces the concept of 'eco-political entities' which give hope of 'surviving together', thus bringing in the specific link between environment and politics, and more broadly, environment and society. It also retains urgency in terms of building alliances in times of crises that are inherently interconnected across environmental, political and social fronts. Coalition groups are defined as "cross-scale and cross-issue articulations" which, put simply, center on the "maintenance and long-term sustainability of everyday life (the achievement of social reproduction)" (Dichiro 2008, 282) and try to work past the "our issues versus your issues" conundrum (280). Dichiro grounds environmentalism firmly in feminism and specifically within reproductive rights issues:

[A]ll environmental issues are reproductive issues; efforts to protect the health and integrity of natural systems – water, air, soil, biodiversity – are struggles to sustain the ecosystems that make all life possible and enable the production and reproduction processes upon which all communities (human and non-human) depend. (285)

What Dichiro does in this statement is blur the line between two issues that could be viewed as separate in terms of who advocates on their behalf: environmental issues and reproductive issues. Essentially, she is practicing a deconstruction of binaries and an

"opening up" - a creation of space for collaboration through redefinition and re-situation of knowledge.

As I discussed earlier, what defines TG as an organization (and transition as a movement), is the fact that it is generally made up of people from privileged or dominant groups in society, while people from marginalized groups are largely not represented. People representing these voices often feel alienated or excluded by TG's binary language or lack of engagement with "other" i.e. non-transition issues. One of the reasons for this is the fact that core TG members see transition as working towards justice that betters the lives of remotely located marginalized others, or of a collective "we", while not necessarily engaging with the social reproduction of the lives of *local* marginalized people for whom, as Dichiro argues, 'sustainability' itself has become an endangered species, in that their way of life, neighborhoods and health are under direct threat of extinction (286-9). This brings to mind the question: how could TG "open up" and redefine resilience - the foundation of it's activism - in coalition with other activisms to foster sustainability in/of diverse (human and non-human) people in Guelph? For instance, TG might bring into its mandate the idea that *only if* issues affecting marginalized groups in Guelph are given priority in terms of community-building, re-localization and sustainability, can *resilience* (i.e. the ability to bounce back from adversity, which marginalized groups are disproportionately facing), be a truly viable proposal.

According to Dichiro's (2008) research, 'coalition politics' has created new kinds of multi-identifying activists; she cites the example of reproductive rights activists in the San Francisco Bay which are now calling themselves 'environmentalists' after engaging in 'coalition politics' with ecological justice groups, thus presenting a concrete way in which the 'our issues versus your issues' problem was successfully tackled by simultaneously strengthening activism around different but related topics (290). In order for to TG foster a truly representative Transition Town Guelph, it might consider cultivating *deep* and meaningful empathetic relationships with organizers who represent demographics other than their own. I stress the word 'deep' because these coalitions need

to go far beyond financial assistance, Facebook support, mutually recommending each other to potential volunteers, or boothing at each other's events; this will again, essentially be a revisiting of the idea of "doing more of what we're already doing" narrative in terms of a redefinition and an opening up of the relational "what", adding in a "with whom?" and a "for whom?"

6.0 Conclusion

Reflecting on my original research questions, I believe that this thesis project has contributed some interesting findings and jumping-off points for further research into the relationship between transition initiatives and justice discourse, as well as justice-based activism.

In terms of the first question: How is justice conceptualized in TG's language? - I discovered that knowledge creation about what justice means for TG is strongly linked to language, which in this case operates according to binaries such as "holding actions" and "new initiatives". These binaries inform ideas of how transition does and does not engage with justice activism.

My second question was: How does the way that TG conceptualizes justice engage people who participate in justice work outside of Transition Guelph? Through my data analysis and theoretical discussions, I found that language binaries around justice are wrapped up in privilege and can actually reinforce oppressive social structures, and contribute to alienating those who have been marginalized by such structures.

This then provided some insight into the third question, which was: How does the way TG conceptualizes justice affect the relationships between TG and other organizations working on justice issues? I found that relationships between TG and other Guelph-based justice activists often remain at superficial levels, which is indicative of one of the "barriers that prevent the Transition movement from 'responding to a diversity of needs by using a diversity of strengths'" (Alloun and Alexander 2014, 7).

The most interesting question for me to explore through this thesis project was the last: how can existing TG language and organizing be made more inclusive and collaborative through intersectional perspectives? This was a question I attempted to answer mainly through my three theoretical discussions which listed: the importance of epistemological reflections that consciously connect epistemology to power; education in terms of overcoming the discomfort of 'privilege fragility'; and the importance of building relationships across difference and diversity with other forms of justice activism.

Here, however, was also where I encountered the limitations of this project. It was my original intention to propose practical ways in which TG can act in terms of reflection, education, and collaboration. I realize now that this was too ambitious of me. I do believe that I have provided what could be important insights and “food for thought” for TG (as well as other transition initiatives) in terms of working through and with difference by engaging in 'coalition politics'. However, in order to propose concrete, practical steps for TG or other organizations dealing with similar issues, a lot more intersectional research must be done. At a local level, I would propose a joint project by TG and local justice activists in Guelph to explore possible partnerships and discuss specific differences that either pose challenges or offer potential solutions to existing challenges. This might include further explorations of 'privilege fragility', including capturing instances in which 'privilege fragility' is successfully dealt with for the empowerment of TG, local marginalized communities, and activist groups working towards social and environmental justice.

Although this thesis was specific to the case of TG and transition, some of the research participants identified language and privilege as limiting factors for justice activist groups in general. Certainly, problems of exclusion in general are to some degree inevitable whenever people organize around specific issues, given that different social groups and individuals construct knowledge about the same issues in different ways. This means that diverse views and attitudes might present barriers to participation. However, issues specifically related to privilege and language form parts of systemic oppressive structures, which can only be addressed if the people from dominant social groups

become aware and actively participate in dismantling them. One research participant stated:

We don't exist in silos in activist communities and if we don't create space to talk about the future and talk about what we want instead, and also putting at the forefront people who have lived experience of marginalization to really understand what can go wrong, then we're gonna keep doing it.

To me, this statement suggests that further reflexive research needs to be done across different types of activism around the effects of language, which could then be developed into practical strategies for collaborative action across environmental and social justice activisms.

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APPENDICES:

Appendix A: Interview Questions

NB: Though I initially divided up my interview questions for "active" and "non-active" participants in TG, the line between these two categories was highly blurred so often questions from both sets overlapped across interviews.

1) Questions for members or active participants in TG:

- Can you offer a brief story or description about your life here in Guelph?
- How would you describe your involvement in TG?
- Can you describe how you came to participate in TG and what motivated you to do so?
- What are "transition initiatives" to you?
- How do you envision communities and community members changing through transition initiatives?
- How do you define "community"?
- Can you touch on the topics of ethics or social justice and how they do or do relate to the transition movement in your opinion?
- Do you think that any community members or groups is or are being left out of participating in TG for reasons that are not within their control?
- Do you see the need for any changes in the way that TG is set up and operates in the community?)
- The average amount of people that come out to a TG or TG sponsored event is 20; how do you feel about this?
- If Guelph really *is* to become a "transition town" like Transition Town Totness, how do you envision the increase in participation within TG?

2) Questions for non-members or non-active participants in TG:

- Can you offer a brief story or description about your life here in Guelph?
- Can you briefly describe TG or the transition movement; or what you know about it?
- Based on what you know about it, how do you associate yourself with the transition initiatives movement/TG?
- Can you talk about why you do not or cannot actively participate in TG events or with the organization?

- Do you have any suggestions for how TG could operate or structure itself to increase participation/be more inclusive?
- In order to function better, if TG could make change in one key area, which area do you think it should be? Can you offer any specific suggestions as to how thy might be able to do this?
- What changes would you like to see in Guelph in general to make it a better place to live?
- What would you like the word "sustainability" to represent?
- How would you envision a community-level transition towards sustainability?

Appendix B: Focus Group Materials

1) Structured Art Activity Steps: Transition Landscapes

- a. Researcher introduces the activity and context of research.
- b. Group dynamic to warm-up. Everyone stand in a circle and look around the room. If you make eye contact with another person, smile and exchange places.
- c. Verbal introduction to art activity.
- d. Verbal instructions to draw a structured element, such as "the hill of emotion" in which participants would draw a hill and translate their emotional state through colours and stroke intensity
- e. After a few minutes each person passes his or her paper to the right.
- f. Steps d. & e. are repeated a few times
- g. Participants walk around the art pieces and write their ideas and reflections down on post-its that they peg to the pieces (art displayed in Appendix B)
- h. Verbal group reflection and Lucie takes notes.

2) Instructions Given for Structured Art Activity: Transition Landscapes

1. The Timeline

Verbal instruction: You know that the topic of this research has to do with social and ecological justice. Imagine your journey with TG and think of instance where the theme of justice has been important, either for positive or negative reasons. Express this journey

as a timeline, which you draw as a border around your paper. The line can be thick/thin/straight/wavy/changing/steady/any colours etc.

Explanation: This was to get the participants thinking specifically about social justice and how it relates to their transition journey as we move into the activity.

PASS PAPERS TO THE PERSON ON THE RIGHT

2. The Self, The Transitioner

Verbal instruction: Choose a colour and close your eyes. Draw only your face or your whole body with your eyes closed and without lifting your pen/pencil/crayon/pastel from the paper.

Explanation: This was meant as a fun starter to the activity and to get people over the fact that drawing something needs to be based on artistic capability. It was also a metaphor for getting past the appearance of a thing and digging deeper - sort of parallel to some of the aims of my research in terms of the relationship between social justice and TG.

PASS PAPERS TO THE PERSON ON THE RIGHT

3. Transition Animal

Verbal instruction: Image that TG is an animal and think about what qualities you attribute to different animals: altruism, fierceness, endurance, calmness... anything. Draw this animal standing or sitting beside the self.

Explanation: This was to be a complement to my interview questions in which I asked participants to explain what transition means to them.

PASS PAPERS TO THE PERSON ON THE RIGHT

4. The Hill of Emotion

Verbal instruction: Now draw a hill behind the self and transition animal. This hill should represent how you are feeling today, right now, in this moment and in this activity. You

can use different types of strokes to colour in the hill and indicate your mood... short and hard, long and sweeping etc.

Explanation: This was to get the participants focused on introspection, which is a big part of heuristic research and get them grounded in the present moment. I was hoping also that the participants would be able to notice any insecurities or apprehensions they had about the topic we were working with.

PASS PAPERS TO THE PERSON ON THE RIGHT

5. The Tree of Intersectionality

Verbal instruction: [Explain/define term "intersectionality"]. Based on the given definitions, try and think about how power and privilege intersect in your life and represent this in the form of a tree that is growing on the hill. Try and think of the branches as the different kinds of privilege/power that you encounter in daily life. If you'd like to label these explicitly then please do so, if not, then try to represent the intersections visually.

Explanation: This was to get the participants thinking about how the term intersectionality might be applied to their daily lives, to try and encourage self-reflection about privilege, and try to get them to connect this to their relationship to TG.

PASS PAPERS TO THE PERSON ON THE RIGHT

6. Nutrients to the Roots of Community

Verbal Instruction: So now you have a tree in front of you that represents an individual that is complex and embedded in a web of intersecting types of power and privilege in their community. Few of the trees are 100% healthy. Think of this "tree person" as being rooted in their community as shown by the roots of the tree. What kind of "community nutrients" does this complex individual need in order to be a healthy tree? Try and visually represent these nutrients.

Explanation: This was to get the participants thinking about the fact that different individuals require different types of "community nourishment". I was hoping that they would remember the tree they drew and see their difference between their own tree and the one they had in front of them. This was also to obtain complementary data to my interviews during which many people expressed the importance of living in community and I had asked them what "community" means to them.

PASS PAPERS TO THE PERSON ON THE RIGHT

7. Other Movements

We know that the transition movement is only one of many social and environmental movements that exist in Guelph, Canada, and worldwide. In keeping with the word *movement*, try and represent these other movements as different forms of weather: rain, storms, sun, wind, snow etc. As you do this try and think about how these movements relate to TG and interact with it in positive or negative ways. Is there a high degree of interaction or is there a lack of interaction?

Explanation: This was to try and encourage the participants to situate the transition movement within the wider context of other movements, some of which may have many of the same goals. This was directly related to some of the interview material I had collected which showed people expressing the sentiment that there is a lack of engagement on the part of TG with other movements who had been trying to reach out to them to collaborate. Other interview data showed that some TG members viewed there being different kinds of activism in terms of "holding actions" and "starting actions" - and associated transition firmly with the latter, which might point to the reason why there was a lack on engagement and perhaps loss of networking and collaborative opportunities.

PASS PAPERS TO THE PERSON ON THE RIGHT

8. Sources of Transition

In an empty area of the paper, draw a set of shapes that represent the sources transition. That is to say, the reasons why transition necessary and why it came about. Try to go

beyond just peak oil and climate change, or try to unpack those two elements and see what you come up with.

Explanation: This was to reground the activity and bring people back to the reasons why any of this transition stuff is actually taking place. I feel that sometimes people get a little bit lost in the fun parts of this movement and need to refocus on why it is actually being carried out. This kind of grounding could also be a stepping-stone for reflection on how social justice could be incorporated into the movement.

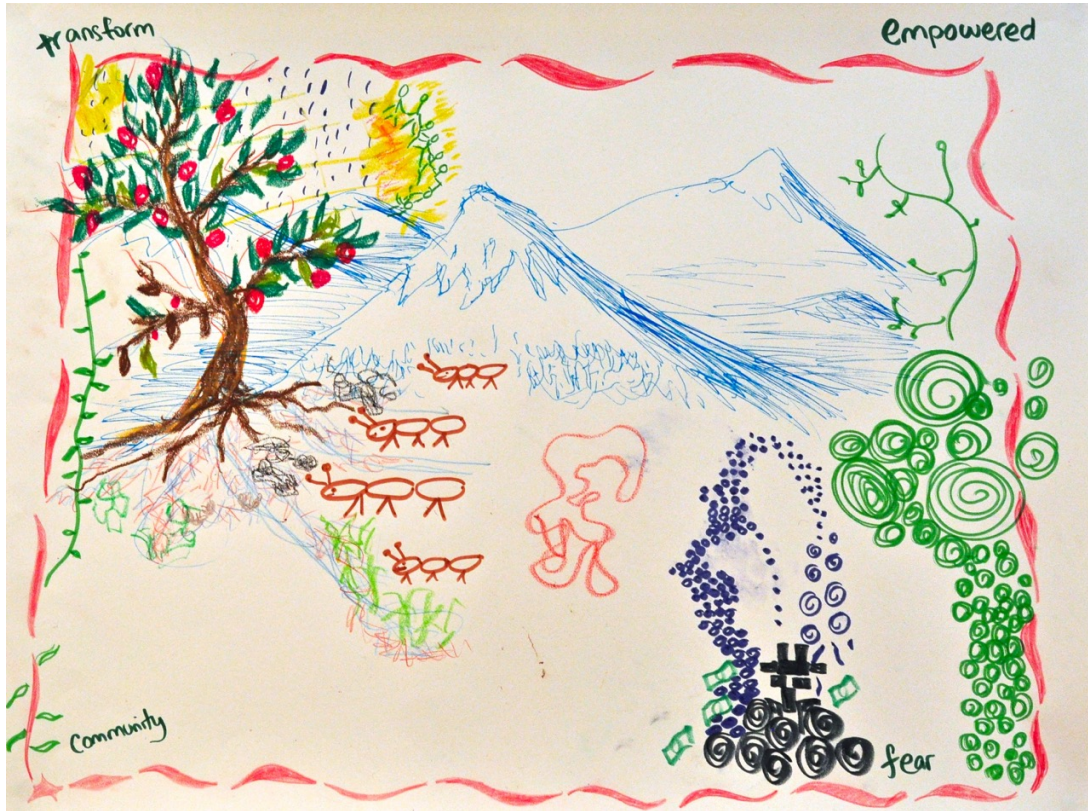
3) Artwork Created:



cont'd. on next page...







4) Steps For Second Part of Focus Group:

- a. Lucie verbally introduces main themes present in research to date.
- b. Participants are paired up and are given sheets of paper; each with one or more quotes from an interviewee and asked to reflect in different ways eg. "Initial feelings/thoughts"; "how does this relate to transition?"; "ideas sparked?"; "reflections"...
- c. Pairs take notes on their discussion and hand their sheets back to me at the end of the session.
- d. Collection of oral feedback and reflection and Lucie takes notes.

5) List of Quotes and Questions for Second Part of Focus Group:

NB: Writing in red is my own notes and green writing or yellow highlights indicate notes I transcribed from focus group participants. Not all questions were answered with written notes, though most were at least discussed out loud.

QUOTE 1:

I went to a few TG meetings. When I quit my job and decided to plug in more into Guelph, one of the things I did was start going to TG meetings ... and I tried to get involved but I don't look like a hippy as much as other people in that group do, or speak like a hippy and while I have a lot of the same values, I think that's just human nature you just zoom in on: "ok, that person more or less looks like me, looks like they have the same ideas as me, I'm gonna bunch up with that" and that's a problem everywhere, not just TG. So I didn't feel overly welcome personally and so for me, that was sort of my experience.

I think it's just about being welcoming and knowing your own prejudice and knowing - I think everybody just wants to be loved and accepted and so you're gonna go to the group that you're pretty sure will love and accept you the most. I think it's about stepping out of your comfort zone and deliberately inserting yourself into communities that are very different than you and figuring out "ok, what do we have in common", cause humans have a lot in common - it's just figuring out what that is which takes time and energy and frustration but it's doable.

Yeah, I think it's about opening yourself up and I think it's hard for groups to do that ... but yeah, I would say, yeah I think it needs to be an individual thing... At the end of the day it's about my personal choice and I think that's how it needs to happen. I think it

requires a change of heart. I think maybe it could be a group thing but I don't know how that would work.

QUESTIONS:

Initial thoughts and emotions?

A need to re-engage within the movement

Therapists on board to [help] people who have trouble with boundaries

Energetic people with emotional and psychological boundaries.

Do you see a tension between transition the movement/group vs. individual transition-ers?

Transition gets stuck because this [referring to the story in the quote] is very common.

Within a working group, there are disagreements, conflicts etc. We kind of lack the drive/ability to work through these. Instead the process just stops because one doesn't like another or other conflicts come up. Or: it's counter-cultural to work through these or even to speak the need for embracing the process within a group.

Value product over process.

Transition gets stuck because we are constrained in the way we think things are supposed to go. People get identified with what they're doing. In order for [different?] things to happen, sometimes you need to give it space. We're still after the result, not the process. Rather than people racing to get things accomplished [?]

Ideas for moving forward?

Why do you think some people might not feel welcome in a movement designed to be inclusive? How can we work around that?

QUOTE 2:

I think that what the transition movement is doing is envisioning a different type of world, a world where we are treating people in a different kind of way... we are nourishing and caring about each other. I'm sure that social justice has a really important place in the centre of all that but I don't see it as a social justice movement. That isn't the

main focus of it, the main focus is to create connected communities and social justice is a piece of that.

The beauty of the transition movement is creating resilience in each place that makes sense to that group so you wouldn't want to overlay specific ethics or social justice into it but integrate principles of caring for each other and perhaps nurturing each individual as an important thing.

QUESTIONS:

What is your reaction this quote? Do you feel the same?

Can you relate this to the theme or idea of "stories in the community that are not being heard"?

Definitely - whatever stories come from other populations tend not to make it to center stage... how to shift that?

Ideas? Emotions?

For me, the work being done on diffraction [by] Karen Harad as a lens.

For me, TG - social justice is an aspect of a broader vision, a movement to better lie on the Earth with respect for [the] planet and each other.

Stewardship more so than ownership...

Entitlement/ownership informs how we see the world + our community so stepping into stewardship creates different possibilities and a sense of place.

What "people" and "we" do you think this person means when they say "a world where we are treating people in a different kind of way"

"we" being who the speaker identifies with - my assumption would be that the speaker has certain privileges that are taken for granted - having a sense of agency is one of those privileges

- large Italian community that is close knit and self-reliant - co-existent

- First Nations community is also close-knit + has resources that could align... responsive to interest

QUOTE 3:

[words passed along to this interviewee from an Indigenous mentor]:
 ...[she said that] when you're living within oppression and even outside of that, some of the most important ways to connect to yourself and learn more about yourself is through action and through learning through others and through creating change and watching how you respond to that and actually connecting to what the work that is about. And so, specifically, grounding that work within connection to the earth [vitaly important!] - and within the spiritual practice, and how you can't separate those two things out and the generations of people before her have been teaching her about how inner transformation should be happening simultaneously with other kinds of transformation. And that it's a responsibility thing...

[more radical activist] people aren't interested [in engaging with TG] even though some of the work they're doing is fairly connected or at least could be.
 I feel like there could be some really cool ways to complicate the conversation about backyard gardening with conversations around gentrification and what does that look like? And talk about how we contribute to gentrification in our communities...

QUESTIONS:

How do you feel about the term "complicate the conversation" - do you think that these kinds of conversations are being had already in TG?

Ideas? Emotions?

Shifting consciousness through engaging in action with people.

I sometimes think that radical activists will think that we're not activists.

[Spiral drawing] The Work that Connects spiral - a way to channel our anger into positive action.

Diversity = more information to work with

Generativity [definition from internet:

a concern for others developed during middle age, esp. a need to nurture and guide younger people and contribute to the next generation]

What kinds of relationships should exist between transition movements and other movements? How "entangled" should they be?

A good example is partnership of TG and OPIRG.

The Transition Movement includes all the groups working towards The Great Turning.

TG needs to support the more "specialized" movements + holding action movements.

Will it [the above engagement] impair the [existing TG] projects?

Garden in low-income area of Guelph = building relationships

This would shift the focus/slow down progress [more on this was discussed verbally in general notes]

Are there any processes that you can think of that you might be a part of that you don't agree with? How do you resolve those complicated relationships to power and justice?