

Voluntary Simplicity:
Lifestyle Activism in Late Modernity

by

Krista Hatfield

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

© 2011
Krista Hatfield



Library and Archives
Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-83097-0
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-83097-0

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

Abstract

This thesis explores the Voluntary Simplicity Movement (VSM) as a form of lifestyle activism unique to the period of reflexive/late modernity. The project creates a conceptual framework that links new social movement theory, anti-consumerism, and the ‘project-of-the-self’ (Giddens, 1991) to investigate how simplifiers fashion a sense of identity and construct new meanings and relationships to consumption. It draws on a dialogic/performance model of narrative analysis to examine field texts emerging from participant-observation at *Transition Ottawa* meetings, which is a local example of the VSM. Its primary finding is that the VS discourse, termed here ‘simplicity-speak’, takes the shape of a therapeutic narrative and is a key category through which the VS identity is projected. It is suggested that the prevalence of self-help rhetoric reflects new and emerging political forms in late modernity.

Acknowledgements

To all of my great teachers—thank-you for the inspiration...

I would like to say a special thank-you to my supervisor, Josh Greenberg. You have taken me under your wing from the very beginning. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work with you and most importantly to learn from you.

I would like to also say thank-you to Eileen Saunders. Your support throughout the entirety of this degree has been important to me. Thank-you kindly for all of your encouragement.

Thank-you to my family for your unconditional love.

And thank-you Craig David—you were the one who got me through...

Table of Contents

Abstract	
Acknowledgements	
<u>Introduction</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Chapter 1: A Review of the Literature</u>	<u>10</u>
The Voluntary Simplicity Movement	10
Mapping Anti-Consumerism	13
Collectivist Approaches	18
Individualist Approaches	21
The ‘New’ in Social Movement Studies	24
Approaches to Identity Formation	31
Conceptualizing Voluntary Simplicity	36
<u>Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework</u>	<u>37</u>
The Modernization of Modernity or a Theory of Reflexive Modernization	38
Time-Space Distanciation	39
Disembedding Mechanisms	41
Reflexivity	44
The Ascription of Risk	47
Projecting the Self	50
Voluntary Simplicity as Lifestyle Activism	54
VS & Reflexive Modernization	54
VS & Ascription of Risk	56
VS & Projecting the Self	59
<u>Chapter 3: Research Methodology</u>	<u>63</u>
The Case of Transition Town Ottawa	63
Narrative Inquiry	65
Participant Observation	69
Participant as Observer	72
Field Work: Experiences & Challenges	73
Making Contact, Gaining Access and Acceptability	74
Building Rapport	76
Reflexivity	77
Towards a Pluralistic Approach	79

<u>Chapter 4: Field Texts: Analysis & Discussion</u>	<u>81</u>
Analysis	81
Thematic Analysis	82
Structural Analysis	93
Linguistic Analysis	99
Discussion	107
<u>Conclusion</u>	<u>114</u>
<u>References</u>	<u>120</u>

List of Tables

Table 1.1. Narrative Elements - Field Texts	140
Table 1.2. Narrative Elements - Field Texts: Composite	141

List of Appendices

Appendix A: A Snapshot of the Transition Movement in 2011	143
Appendix B: Field Sites	145

Introduction

The ‘self-improvement’ market is estimated to be worth 5.7 billion dollars, and at 32%, the largest category within that market is defined as ‘motivational, spiritual, and self-help products and programs’ (Woodstock, 2007, p.169). Approximately, one third to one half of Americans have purchased a self-help book in their lifetime (McGee, 2005). Self-help, in all its multiple forms—books, seminars, video, audio—is a powerful multimedia industry with considerable economic influence. Another marker of the genre’s cultural influence, alongside these commercial indices, is the therapeutic language of self-help has permeated contemporary rhetoric (Illouz, 2008; Woodstock, 2007; McGee, 2005; Hazleden, 2003). For example, the advertising industry draws on ‘positive thinking’ and ‘the purchasing motivation’ of good self-esteem (Woodstock, 2007, p.169). Popular rhetoric on television talk shows, the Internet and bestselling books adopt a language of self-improvement in discussing issues of intimacy, personal growth and also addiction (Lichterman, 1992). Also, support groups have served as one of the main cultural vehicles for the ‘translation of the textual and institutional structures of therapy’ (Illouz, 2008, p.186). Support groups are very diverse in orientation—from assertiveness training groups to Alcoholics Anonymous to survivors of sexual abuse, rape and trauma is to only name a few. The fact there can be such a wide variety of themes around which support groups organize is suggestive of both their ubiquity and cultural significance. Ultimately, therapy under many forms has been diffused worldwide. As Woodstock (2007) suggests, in ‘offering a prevalent social norm to endorse contemplative, therapeutic care of the self,’ the self-help ethos comes to suggest ‘a social belief and behavior’ as well as an ‘individual one’ (p.185).

However, despite its prevalence, self-help is frequently slighted as ‘inconsequential fluff’, ‘joke material’ or ‘cliché’ (Woodstock, 2007). A common and more substantive criticism stems from the ‘individualist ethos’ promoted within the self-help and therapeutic discourse (Lasch, 1979; Bellah et al., 1985; Reiff, 1987; Lears, 1981). Critics are wary that self-help literature focuses on individual concerns in ways that are incompatible with collective political forms. It is argued the move towards an increasingly isolated individualism constricts ‘moral and political reasoning with the narrow horizons of self-gratification and self-protection’ (Lichterman, 1992, p.422.) As public life becomes increasingly subject to the values of private life, ‘we are weakened in our ability to cope with public and political life’ (Hazleden, 2003, p.414). As argued by Illouz (2008):

The very seductiveness of consumption and therapeutic self-absorption marks the decline of any serious opposition to society and the general cultural exhaustion of Western civilization. No longer capable of creating heroes, binding values and cultural ideals, the self has withdrawn inside its own empty shell. In calling on us to withdraw into ourselves, the therapeutic persuasion has made us abandon the great realms of citizenship and politics and cannot provide us with an intelligible way of linking private self to the public sphere because it has emptied the self of its communal and political content, replacing this content with a narcissistic self-concern (p.2).

Our age is characterized as being preoccupied with the examination and reformation of the self in which ‘we are not what we are but what we make ourselves’ (Hazleden, 2003, p.413). In late modernity, individuals must integrate information from diverse experiences (lived and mediated), in such a way that self-identity has to be shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, on a local and global scale (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1986/1992). Thus some theorists argue the recent preoccupation with the self serves as ‘a tool of social control’

(as cited in McGee, 2005, p.22), that the ‘depoliticizing effects of therapy and self-help are used as a political strategy by contemporary capitalism to serve the purpose of powerful economic interests’ (Hazleden, 2003, p.414). In this view, therapeutic rhetoric is a principle means by which capitalism’s objectives are accomplished (Woodstock, 2007). It is argued the commercialization of therapy ‘alleviates social fears and anxieties’ resulting from modernization by training one’s attention internally and thus away from social upheaval (Woodstock, 2007, p.167). However, this claim fails to distinguish between new impulses towards personal growth, on the one hand, and pressures towards personal advantage and material accumulation on the other (Roszak, 1979, xxviii). Critics mistake the new ethos of self-discovery for a ‘culture of narcissism’ (Lasch, 1979), holding it responsible for a perceived impoverishment of public life (Bellah et al., 1985; Putnam, 2000).

Contrary to the view that the therapeutic ethos privileges a narcissistic self, others argue that it is in the wake of a ‘new insecurity’ that self-help philosophy becomes appealing (Wallulis, 1998). McGee (2005) suggests ‘a sense of personal security is anomalous, while anxiety is the norm’ (p.12). To manage this anxiety, individuals ‘invest in themselves, manage themselves and continuously improve themselves’ (p.12). Scholars (Beck 1986/1992; Giddens, 1991) speak of ‘permanently fragmentary and unfinished life projects’ and argue that these processes reflect the accelerating dynamics of modernization (as cited in Brockmeier, 2000, p.69). In other words, there is a ‘dialectical relationship’ between ‘social relations external to the self’ and the ‘personal decisions’ through which particular individuals respond to those relations (Abbinnett, 2003, p.31). In this way, it is through ‘the engagement of the self with the consequences

of modernization’ that it becomes possible for individuals to ‘mount a political challenge’ to late modernity (Abbinnett, 2003, p.31). ‘Seeking one’s own desire’, ‘inventing a life of one’s own’, ‘creating a self’ becomes a necessary factor in social and political change (McGee, 2005, p.23). In this view, then ‘the pursuit of individual self-invention continues to hold radical political possibilities, particularly when one’s own pursuit of self-invention confounds existing social expectations (McGee, 2005, p.23).

Some of the most vibrant trends taking issue with the global threats imposed by processes of modernization—pollution, over-population, dehumanization and stress—are reflected in the varied discourses of anti-consumerism. Following the perception of a ‘society at risk’ (Beck, 1986/1992), increasingly individuals are modifying their consumer and lifestyle choices in order to seek a more meaningful existence (as cited in Cherrier & Murray, 2002, p. 245). One trend in particular adheres to the view that self-fulfillment ‘serves as a catalyst for social change’ (McGee, 2005, p.23). The Voluntary Simplicity Movement (VSM), which is the focus of this thesis, calls into question the ‘good life’ in advanced capitalist society and advocates a ‘less materialistic lifestyle as a more personally fulfilling, spiritually enlightening, socially beneficial, and environmentally sustainable lifestyle’ (Andrews, 1997; Elgin, 1981; Etzioni, 1998). However, despite an underlying premise which posits that individual transformation can spur social and political change, the VSM has been faulted for over-determining personal lifestyle choices and thus failing to engage in a reformative critique that might generate broader political and social change (Witkowski, 2010).

Many studies of social movements are preoccupied with the most ‘visible and dramatic manifestations’ of contemporary political protest (Horton, 2003, p.63).

However, ‘the sphere of everyday’ is an important and frequently overlooked part of contemporary activism (Horton, 2003, p.63). As Horton (2003) suggests, there is a ‘less visible world’ of continuous action that exists beyond these public performances (p.63). All social movements are sustained in ‘submerged networks’ (Melucci, 1989), and it is within these submerged networks, particularly, that adherents of the VSM—known as simplifiers—organize and attend meetings, study a whole range of simple living texts and grapple with the development of simple living practices (Horton, 2003). Thus, in resisting the ideology of consumerism, simplifiers tend not to engage in collective action in a traditional sense, but focus instead on managing individual consumer practices (Schor, 1998). It is within this context, the central question of this project emerges: ‘if conspicuous consumption is an individual, private and self-interested action, can it also be a source for collective, public or socially oriented action?’ In view of this question the project explores ‘how’ simplifiers fashion a sense of identity. In spite of many advances made in understanding the ethical and political content of anti-consumerist movements, very little is known about the ‘life projects’ of practitioners themselves (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1986/1992; Bennett, 2003). The thesis focuses on how simplifiers construct, internalize and realize new meanings of consumption in order to better understand the political subjectivities underlying alternative consumer practices.

The central argument of the thesis is that voluntary simplicity is a specific mode of lifestyle activism that is unique to the period of reflexive/late modernity. Voluntary simplicity tends to be conceptualized in terms of its ‘practices’ (vegetarianism, recycling, buying local, etc.) (Shaw & Newholm, 2002), while questions about the political subjectivities informing this lifestyle choice have been overlooked. In the first chapter, I

situate voluntary simplicity within a discourse of anti-consumerism, in order to highlight its political undertones. I review the literature on voluntary simplicity, anti-consumerism, new social movements and identity formation. Bringing these bodies of literature together provides insight on how simplifiers construct social reality and fashion a sense of identity. I create a conceptual framework from which to interrogate how the actions of an average citizen can be seen to function as a mode of cultural critique and reform. Ultimately, I position voluntary simplicity as an indirect form of anti-consumerism—i.e. a form of lifestyle activism.

Chapter 2 sets the theoretical stage for conceptualizing lifestyle choices as forms of political expression. The dynamic forces of modernity—time-space distancing, disembedding mechanisms and reflexivity—are shown to radically restructure the conditions of social life, giving rise to a ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1986/1992). In late modernity, ‘risks’ are consequences relating to the threatening forces of modernization: they are often ecological and high-tech risks, typically escaping human perception (e.g. toxins in food, nuclear threats, etc.), and they are no longer tied to their place of origin (i.e. they outlast generations) (Beck, 1986/1992). In addition to producing global risks, processes of modernization are undermining traditional, cultural and communal ties and as a result, there are no longer authoritative guidelines to leading one’s life (Giddens, 1991). Under the conditions of risk society, I argue that ‘living and acting in uncertainty’ becomes a basic kind of experience, not only demanding that individuals think, act and live (Beck, 1994, p.12), but that in doing so they also sustain and constantly revise their narrative of self-identity (Atkinson, 2007). In this case, identity formation becomes a process that ‘interconnects perception of a society at risk, self-conception and individual

autonomy' (Cherrier & Murray, 2002, p.246). It is within a theory of reflexive modernization and, subsequently, a theory of risk society, that I show how the choice to 'live simply' can be seen as a form of active reflection rooted in a critique of political and economic power.

Chapter 3 discusses narrative inquiry as it relates to my methodological approach. I follow a 'dialogic/performance' model of narrative analysis as a way of telling the story of voluntary simplicity from the perspectives of simplifiers themselves (Reissman, 2008). My selection of the narrative approach links my analysis to the larger reflexive methodology framing this study; that is, my observations and interpretations of field materials are a reflexive exercise through which meanings are made rather than found (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). Thus I make explicit my methodological and interpretive decisions, with the aim of lending my research greater validity (Luttrell, 2010a). I also offer in this chapter a description of Transition Town Ottawa¹ (TTO), which is the setting of my fieldwork, framing it as an 'instance' of voluntary simplicity (Snow & Trom, 2002). TTO is a local site where I can engage in participant-observation, which is my primary method of analysis. Ultimately, this chapter suggests I will attend to narrative as part of the 'sense-making process' while also focusing on social and cultural processes (Phoenix, 2008). I argue narrative techniques are suited to understanding 'lifestyle-oriented politics' (Bennett, 1998), as they give attention to both individual and social processes.

¹ The *Transition Movement* first emerged in the UK as an effort to challenge climate change and peak oil and is now spread worldwide (Hopkins & Lipman, 2008). It promotes new modalities of living which draw on local community support to build resilience through a process of relocalization (Hopkins & Lipman, 2008). 'Transition towns' focus on key issues of sustainability and it does so through a strategy of simple living (See Appendix A).

Chapter 4 presents narratives I encountered while in the field according to a dialogic/performance model of narrative analysis. I interrogate my observations and field texts, in terms of their themes, narrative structures and uses of language. My thematic analysis reveals that members of the transition community organize around shared feelings of being overwhelmed, anxious and fearful about the transition to sustainable living. While anxiety and uncertainty are often seen as sources of vulnerability, these are what bind simplifiers together, providing the cultural symbols and narrative cues they need to fashion a shared identity. The analysis points to the role of the transition network as a support vehicle for its members. The structural analysis shows how accounts of transition ‘hang together’ narratively (Reissman, 2008), exposing how members ‘tell stories’ about simple living in remarkably similar ways. Finally, by paying close attention to linguistic and rhetorical devices used in the transition discourse, it is shown how members of the transition community use language to promote the simplicity ideology. Ultimately, thematic, structural and linguistic analyses provide the basis for conceptualizing ‘accounts of simple living’ as their own narrative genre—what I term, ‘simplicity-speak’. Conceptualized in this way—as a unique genre of discourse—simplicity-speak is a ‘mode of action’ comprising ‘routine and repeated ways of acting and expressing particular orders of knowledge and experience (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p.383).

The final section of chapter 4 presents a discussion of my analysis in relation to my research questions. I argue voluntary simplicity ‘is’ a form of daily political practice, but not as it is conceptualized by the advocates of ‘political consumerism’ (Bennett, 1998; Micheletti et al., 2004; Scammell, 2003). Instead, I offer my own three-pronged

interpretation. First, the transition group identity is made and maintained through specific storytelling practices. Second, transition members are co-constructing new meanings and relationships to consumption. In other words, they are ‘creating’ culture. Third, I suggest they do this through a therapeutic language emphasizing the role of emotion in political action. Thus, I argue the transition network, as an example of voluntary simplicity, can be seen as a self-help movement. Based on these findings, in the concluding chapter, I reflect on how theories of risk society (Beck, 1986/1992) characterize politics in late modernity. I suggest that voluntary simplicity should be seen as a new and emerging political form and that we need to reconsider our conceptions of ‘the activist’.

The ‘collapse of traditional social roles’, the ‘demise of established patterns of life’, the ‘multiplication of values’ and the ‘intensification of social anxiety and fear’ marks late modernity as a period of transformation (Illouz, 2008, p.57). Under these conditions, it is not the ‘project-of-the-self’ (Giddens, 1991) but the prevalence of a ‘self-help ethos’ that is the most telling. In that one way ideas become dominant is when they ‘help us do things’ (Illouz, 2008, p.20). In other words, a discourse will keep “functioning and circulating if it accomplishes certain things that ‘work’ in people’s everyday lives” (Illouz, 2008, p. 21, emphasis in original). In this way, simplicity-speak—the discourse of voluntary simplicity—not only addresses the social experience of simplifiers but also offers them a ‘symbolic and practical way of action’ (Illouz, 2008, p.20).

Chapter 1: A Review of the Literature

Voluntary Simplicity: Lifestyle Activism in Late Modernity is a study about anti-consumerist activism and its relationship to cultural change. It begins with a review of the literature on voluntary simplicity, anti-consumerism, new social movements and identity formation. In particular, it examines how these bodies of literature frame questions of individualism and then conceptualizes the relationship between voluntary simplicity (as a mode of anti-consumerist activism) and cultural change. The chapter argues that even after bringing these bodies of scholarship together, the subjective experience of lifestyle activism remains an incomplete conceptual project.

The Voluntary Simplicity Movement

The Voluntary Simplicity Movement (VSM) has become an increasingly popular discourse in sustainable living. Numerous books, magazines, 'how-to' guides and networks of local conscious-raising groups, called 'simplicity circles,' diffuse strategies for a more 'simplified lifestyle' (Andrews, 1997). Simplifiers advocate for less materialistic lifestyles, which are more "fulfilling, spiritually enlightening, socially beneficial, and environmentally sustainable" (Johnson, 2004, p.527). For many of its proponents, voluntary simplicity has as much to do with the 'time pressures' and 'pace of life' dictated by a highly competitive and marketized economy as it has with 'overconsumption of material things' (Witkowski, 2010, p.249). The communitarian philosopher Amitai Etzioni (1998) defines VS as the 'choice out of free will to limit expenditures on consumer goods and services'(p.620).

Scholarly work on the movement began in the 1980's with Duane Elgin's *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life that is Outwardly Simple and Inwardly Rich* (1981). Elgin (1981) drew on various world religions to provide the philosophical underpinnings of leading a simple life. The philosophy was often explicitly anti-consumerist in its views (Etzioni, 1998). Five major themes about the practices of simple living have emerged through the literature. Voluntary simplifiers identify themselves as being concerned with at least one the following issues: practicing minimal consumption (living with less); being focused on people over products; being community oriented; being concerned with one's own well being; and being focused on spiritual and/or environmental issues (Craig-Lees, 2002). Fundamentally, voluntary simplicity refers to the cultivation of non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning (Etzioni, 2004).

Voluntary simplicity is observable, however, at different levels of intensity. The level of engagement in simplified living varies, and can be distinguished in terms of 'downshifters', 'strong simplifiers' or those who are 'members of the voluntary simplicity movement' (Etzioni, 2004, p.409). 'Downshifters' live in urban centers and only give up 'some' consumer goods (Etzioni, 2004). The difference should be noted between those who voluntarily consume less and those who exchange one set of goods for another. Some invest in a 'quieter brand of luxury', where less is considered more; however, while some products appear 'simple' in style they are in fact, more costly (Etzioni, 1998, p.622). 'Strong simplifiers' give up higher paying and more stressful jobs as a means to a simplified lifestyle (Etzioni, 2004). Strong simplifiers make a more significant commitment to the VS lifestyle in comparison to downshifters. Finally, members of the voluntary simplicity movement tend to live outside of an urban setting,

residing in cottages or in agricultural settings, removed from the fast paced setting of advanced capitalist society. They are self-sustainable and focus on creating and reusing the products they require for basic human needs, such as raising livestock or opting into green energy sources available from their own utilities (Schor, 2010). Most importantly, those who have holistically adopted the lifestyle, live explicitly according to a VS philosophy (Etzioni, 2004). Common to all levels of VS adherence is that individuals ‘choose’ to live with less, rather than living with less because of economic hardship. Simplifiers tend to be wealthy, educated and have already met basic needs for food, shelter and security (Zavestoski, 2002).

Voluntary simplicity is of interest to both social scientists and market researchers. Social scientists who believe in the potential of a VS ideology to promote social equality and sustainability argue that a shift in focus from ‘me’ to ‘we’ could contribute to a more meaningful existence by reinvesting in communal wealth and security (Schor, 2010). Consumer behavior theorists, on the other hand, target simplifiers as a potential market from which to make a profit (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Those in marketing and advertising investigate this group with the aim of defining specific ‘simplifier characteristics’ that will help constitute them as a new niche market (Shaw & Newholm, 2002, p.170). Ultimately, researchers want to understand what moves someone to make this decision, as simplified living is a conscious choice.

Research efforts have been focused on documenting what precisely simplifiers are doing. Research subjects are often asked how frequently they engage in a variety of activities, from composting to vegetarianism, making gifts, recycling, buying local, to direct forms of political activism, as a way of defining the commitment levels of those

engaging in VS (Huneke, 2005). Existing research relies significantly on the ‘practices’ of simplifiers as a representation of commitment levels and motivations. Less common though, is scholarly analysis on the subjective experiences of individuals who are adopting this lifestyle. Focusing on the ‘practices’ of simplifiers alone overlooks how these practices produce experience and meaning on the parts of participants. VS adherents are often referred to as ‘ethical consumers’ because their lifestyle choices are shaped by moral concerns about the environment and human rights (Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Participants are engaged in a struggle to define themselves as worthwhile and good people (Grigsby, 2004). In other words they are engaged in moral identity work (Sandlin & Walther, 2009). Yet very little is known about how simplifiers construct, internalize, and realize new meanings of consumption (Cherrier, 2003). By situating the VSM within a discourse of anti-consumerism, the aim is to begin to address these issues.

Mapping Anti-Consumerism

The following is a modest attempt to review the literature that addresses the various forms anti-consumerism can take. In line with existing scholarship, the review will take its form by creating an anti-consumerist continuum (Schor, 2000; Binkley & Littler, 2008; Ross, 2008). It will illustrate anti-consumerism by positioning its various articulations on a spectrum that ranges from consumer activists who boycott products, to reflexive consumers who choose to buy only organic products. At the outset, an attempt will be made to synthesize a definition of anti-consumerism, as it is highly contested within the literature.

In basic terms, the definition of anti-consumerism is the opposition to consumer capitalism². It refers to grievances against, and attempts to change consumer culture³. Anti-consumerism is an ethical standpoint expressed through ‘a broad set of existing social movements and their discourses, which range from religious and traditional groups to ecologists, labour and anti-globalization activists and cultural vanguards’ (Binkley & Littler, 2008, p.524). Given the diversity amongst those who employ the anti-consumerist rhetoric, in many cases the anti-consumerist ‘repertoires’ can be ‘disparate’ and often ‘incommensurable’; however, its ‘practices resonate with each other across their shared regard for the consumer market as an obstruction to some other ethical, moral, political, social or cultural objective’ (Binkley & Littler, 2008, p.524). A further distinction has been made within the anti-consumerist discourse between *anti-consumerism* (consuming differently) and *anti-consumption* (consuming less) (Binkley & Littler, 2008). Anti-consumerist movements are ‘not opposed to consumption *per se*, but seek alternatives to existing forms of consumer capitalism’ (p.525). While anti-consumption, ‘denotes a position against consumption *per se*, regardless of the socio-cultural economic system in which the product is used up’ (p.526). Anti-consumerism may challenge consumer capitalism by way of boycotts or legal challenges posed by the ‘No Logo generation’; while the latter category of anti-consumption may be expressed through movements or

²The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are identified as being particularly influential in promoting the growth of consumer culture, through the development of transnational corporations and the subsequent growth of advertising agencies, marketing organizations and communications media (Smart, 2010). Notably, the growth of these institutions has come at the expense of an increasingly commercialized public space and culture. A shift from an economy dominated by production to one strongly influenced by consumption has led us to describe advanced capitalist societies as consumerist.

³ Consumer culture can be defined as the ‘meanings, representations, and practices that organize consumption as a way of life’ (Dunn, 2008, p.8).

networks that include ‘projects of self-development amongst their practical goals’ (p.526). It is important to recognize that the ‘lines between these two spheres can become indistinct’, as their goals and tactics tend to overlap (p.526). Thus aiming to distinguish between rhetorics that are anti-*consumption* or anti-*consumerism* can be difficult if not futile, particularly since perspectives can fluctuate not only within individual networks but also amongst the subjects that constitute those networks. Dealing with the subject by looking at activism and policy, and by also ‘situating the subject historically and considering the subjectivities involved in its constitutions’ would be more fruitful (p.527).

If anti-consumerist activism is considered a form of consumer-driven social action (Littler, 2009), then it has a long history—‘almost as old as capitalism itself’ (Etzioni, 2003, p.7). Anti-consumerism can be traced back to the consumer co-operatives emerging in the mid-nineteenth century, as a response from working class communities to the ‘excessive prices and poor quality of goods’ being produced at the time (Smart, 2010, p.200). Still in existence today, consumer co-operatives focus on securing low prices and good quality products for its members. Anti-consumerist activism also has historical roots in the ‘movement for consumer rights’. Its tradition is expressed in the ‘value for money ethos’, seeking to equip the consumer, who is ‘imagined as rational and sovereign’, with fuller knowledge (Binkley & Littler, 2008, p.526). Its object has also been to disseminate information with the aim of protecting and enlightening consumers through its monitoring of the quality of prices and goods (Nava, 1990). Although the co-operative and consumer rights movements restrict their objectives to ‘protecting’ the consumer with little interest in wielding political power (Nava, 1990, p.168), these discourses tend

to be ‘against consumerism as an ideology’ and can therefore be considered anti-consumerist in nature (Binkley & Littler, 2008, p.526).

The literature tends to focus on these ‘histories’ of consumer activism, as outlined above, while paying less attention to its more contemporary forms (Littler, 2009). In this context, Richard Day (2005) outlines a wide range of activist practices that aim to either intervene against the state and corporate power or create alternatives to the existing order. Although the focus of this thesis is not anti-capitalist anarchism, as it is for Day (2005), conceptualizing activism remains a central focus. Day’s (2005) work is useful in that he creates an activist continuum, where he posits direct-action activities on one end of the spectrum and more lifestyle-oriented activities on the other. He outlines five key approaches to activism: ‘lifestyle anarchism’, ‘cultural subversion’, ‘impeding the flows of state and corporate power’, ‘direct-action’ and ‘creating alternatives’ (Day, 2005, p.19-45). Day organizes these practices in terms of their increasing efficacy and radicalism. Briefly, ‘lifestyle anarchism’ is defined as a ‘middle-class, escapist, feel-good subculture’ (p.21). It denotes living an alternative lifestyle within a positive and supportive community. Community gardens, bike workshops and free art classes are characteristic of the activities adopted within these alternative lifestyles. ‘Cultural subversion’ draws on a technique called ‘detournement’ (p.21). Detournement⁴ ‘involves taking images and text from mainstream media and subverting them for other ends’ (p.22). In the next category, Day illustrates how *Reclaim the Streets* (RTS) has ‘impeded the flow of state and corporate power’ by barricading major motorways and downtown streets. In this case, ‘it

⁴ In Debord’s terms, ‘detournement’ is the process of ‘bringing together two independent expressions in which the final product supercedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of greater efficacy’ (as cited in Rasmussen, 2006, p. 2).

becomes more difficult for the dominant system to operate as normal' (p.25). For Day, 'direct action' takes its form within 'militant, anti-capitalist organizations' and '[uses] direct action methods to confront [case-by-case] injustices' (p.32). Finally, the most radical form of activism aims to 'create alternatives' to the existing neo-liberal order. It is often through 'affinity groups' that this task is accomplished (p.35). These groups are 'consensus-driven and oriented to achieving maximum effectiveness with a minimum of bureaucracy, infighting and exposure to infiltration' (p.35). In other words, this form of activism is most appropriate for illegal or otherwise 'can't be public actions' (p.35). These tactics have been adopted for example, as an 'organizing tool at major anti-globalization convergences' (p.35).

Day's last three categories of activism tend to emerge as a result of work completed by groups of activists, whereas the first two categories can be seen as resulting from more individualistic approaches to activism. Impeding existing flows, direct action and creating alternatives are explicitly collectively oriented in its activism. While in obvious ways lifestyling can be seen as an individualistic approach to activism and according to Day, so is cultural subversion as it does not require 'select membership' to participate rather 'billboard liberation is dispersed as a non-branded tactic open to all' (p.22). Similarly, anti-consumerist activism can be characterized as either collectivistic or individualistic in its approaches. In such a way then, outlining the range of activist forms has provided a 'blueprint' for mapping out anti-consumerism, while also locating anti-consumerism within a broader category of activism. In support of this view, Binkley (2008) suggests a project that aims to account for the full range of consumer activism would start by positing an 'ideal-type distinction between anti-consumerist outlooks

defined by collectivistic and individualistic rationalities' (p.600). Organized consumers, for whom 'consumption is the object of a social movement', is the expression of a collectivist orientation within anti-consumerism (p.600). While more individualistic approaches are represented by 'everyday rationalities and consumption habits [of] educated and reflexive consumers' (p.600).

Collectivist Approaches

In *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (2000), Naomi Klein argues it will be anti-corporate activism that will provide the alternative to corporate rule. Klein (2000) argues that although 'the latter half of the 1990s [has] seen a growth in the brand's ubiquity, a parallel phenomenon has emerged on the margins: a network of environmental, labour and human rights activists determined to expose the damage' caused by multinational corporations (p.326). According to Klein (2000), this powerful form of activism is a 'movement-of-movements' that includes members ranging from young to old, student to professional, and she argues this movement reaches well beyond trade unions. Movement-of-movements is a commonly used phrase referring to a number of social movements, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and other networks emerging in the 1990s, 'to protest the detrimental effects of neo-liberalism on people around the world' (Gautney, 2010, p.3). The term movement-of-movements is used to capture the way it operates in a 'decentralized and horizontal fashion' and because this global network consists of ecology movements, anarchists, trade unions, feminists, human rights and other activists from a variety of backgrounds (Gautney, 2010, p.3). It was after the 1999 Seattle anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) protests, known as the *Battle in Seattle* that the movement-of-movements emerged (Littler, 2009). The

movement has created alternative world summits to the WTO in the form of ‘world social forums’, which aim to provide a space for public debates about the processes of globalization (Littler, 2009, p.40). Although the movement does consist of many individual groups and organizations, each share a common objective over the need to ‘establish alternative forms of globalization that put ‘people before profits’, respect the environment, and enable a freer flow of people, ideas and cultural forms’ (Gautney, 2010, p.4). For Klein (2000), it is the movement-of movements and its anti-capitalist activism that will be the leaders of the anti-consumerist revolution (as cited in Ritzer, 2002).

Alongside Naomi Klein, Kalle Lasn (2000) is one of the most commonly referenced anti-consumerist advocates. As the founder of *Adbusters*, an anti-consumerist organization based out of Vancouver B.C., Lasn (2000) promotes a collectivist approach to cultural change and the direct-action strategy called ‘culture jamming’⁵. Culture jamming seeks to undermine the marketing rhetoric of multinational corporations, specifically through such practices as ‘media hoaxing, corporate sabotage, billboard liberation and trademark infringement’ (Harold, 2004, p.190). Sophisticated culture jams are ‘interceptions: a counter message that hacks into a corporation’s own method of communication to send a message starkly at odds with the one that was intended’ (Klein, 2000, p.281). Lasn describes culture jamming as a form of jujitsu: ‘in one simple deft move you slap the giant on its back’ (as cited in Klein, 2000, p.281). In a similar fashion, Billy Talen, who adopts the persona of *Billy the Reverend* of the *Church of Life After Shopping*, promotes direct and collective action through a type of theatrical culture jam.

⁵ Note: Day (2005) conceptualizes culture jamming as an individualized approach to activism, while others view it as a collectivist approach—a ‘global network’ of culture jammers (Adbusters, 2011b)

His performances are ‘activist-theatre events’, as in the case when he performs ‘anti-consumerist conversions’ on the streets (Littler, 2009, p.80). *The Church of Life After Shopping* is a New York based arts organization that uses theatre, humour and grassroots organizing to enact core values [of] participatory democracy, ecological sustainability, and the preservation of vibrant communities and local economies” (Rev. Billy, 2010, About Us Section).

Traditionally, culture jammers trace their roots back to Guy Debord and the Situationists⁶ (Klein, 2000). The Situationist International (SI) was critical of capitalism’s ‘deceitful promise of fulfillment through entertainment and consumption’ (Debord, 1967/1983, p.192). Given that both *Adbusters* and *The Church of Life After Shopping* draw from SI for inspiration, it can be argued that their view of the individual is as a cultural dupe (Littler, 2009). Cultural jams are based upon the premise that the consumers of the world are under the influence of a media spectacle, and that they need to be awakened from their passive state. From this view, it is assumed that through these culture jams one can begin to enact a sense of agency. Within the literature, both *Adbusters* and *The Church* are viewed as a ‘promotional tactic to create a discursive space for rethinking the relations of consumption’ (Littler, 2005, p.239). They argue for ‘large scale social change by forming new principles of economic and environmental sustainability’, and this change is imagined through ‘ideological and discursive shifts’ (Littler, 2009, p.85). The strategies adopted, however, tend not to define what that alternative is or could be. Thus, the critique has been that the result is ‘no real alternative to our culture of consumption, just a different brand’ (Klein, 2000, p.295).

⁶ Situationist International (SI) was a group of revolutionaries associated with the student riots against capitalism in Paris of May 1968 (Klein, 2000).

Individualist Approaches

‘Ethical consumption’ is the term that most broadly accounts for all variants of individualized forms of anti-consumerism (Littler, 2009). While Schor (2006) uses the term ‘conscious consumption’ to emphasize the “contemporary and historical purchasing practices of consumers who are ‘mindful’ of larger political and social contexts” (as cited in Littler, 2009, p.6, emphasis in original), Micheletti (2003) prefers the term ‘political consumerism’. Political consumerism refers to the ‘actions by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices’ (Micheletti, 2003, p.2). These choices are based on ‘attitudes and values regarding issues of justice, fairness, and/or other non-economic issues’ (Micheletti, 2003,p.2), and it can take three forms: boycotts, buycotts and discursive political consumerism.

Political consumerism is not a new phenomenon, as it dates back to at least the eighteenth century (Nava, 1990). Its origins can be located in the ‘consumer boycott’ and the political act of choosing not to buy certain products (Micheletti, 2003). Boycotts are commonly defined as attempts ‘by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace’ (Friedman, 1995, p.198). More recently though, activists are hesitant to use this method as they are finding they do more harm than good in terms of workers’ rights and livelihoods (Ross, 2003). Boycotts may lead to workers being laid off, as ‘more often than not companies will seek to clear its name’ by cutting contracts or moving its operations rather than trying to solve the problem (Ross, 2008, p.780).

The second form of political consumerism is the ‘consumer boycott’, which was popularized by the early 1990s (Nava, 1990). Boycotts advocate that consumers ‘follow special purchasing guidelines’ when making consumer choices (Micheletti & Stolle, 2008, p.751). Politically motivated shopping (boycotts), which rely on labeling schemes and shopping guides, has been stimulated by the global environmental crisis and government inaction (Nava, 1990). Green consumerism, for example, is said to “offer ordinary people access to a new and very immediate democratic process: ‘voting’ about the environment can take place on a daily basis” (Nava, 1990, p.168, emphasis in original). However, it has been argued that this is not always a ‘realistic alternative’, as labeling is voluntary and thus requires a good, ‘open working relationship between corporate actors and NGOs’ (Micheletti & Stolle, 2008, p.752).

Activists are devoting much of their time to the final form of political consumption, a ‘discursive political consumerism’ (Micheletti, 2008). It is defined as the ‘expressions of opinions about corporate policy and practice in communication efforts directed at businesses, the public and various political institutions’ (Micheletti & Stolle, 2008, p.753). The approach is not necessarily targeted at a company’s product, but also at their image, brand names, reputation and logo. Discursive political consumerism uses a variety of ‘non-economic tools to convince the public and/or business leaders that social responsibility is good for the corporate world’ (Micheletti & Stolle, 2008, p.753). Activists use ‘unconventional approaches to challenge the corporate image-making process, by making the politics of products visible for the global consumer’ (Peretti & Micheletti et al., 2004, p.127). In this way, political consumerism is an advocacy strategy. It incorporates more traditional techniques, such as contacting politicians, corporate

directors or media makers, while also accounting for less conventional tactics such as culture jamming, hactivism, and guerilla media stunts (Peretti & Micheletti, 2004).

According to Micheletti (2003), it is the relationship between the actor and social action in political consumerism that designates it as a mode of individualized action. In particular, Micheletti (2003) conceptualizes political consumerism by contrasting the idea of ‘individualized collective action’ with ‘collectivist collective action’ (p.27).

Individualized collective action is a form of citizen engagement that combines ‘self-interest’ and the ‘general good’ (p.25). Collectivist collective action, by contrast, assumes more traditional forms, such as within ‘membership-based interest groups’ or ‘political parties’ (p.27). Individualized collective action does not require someone else or an outside structure to take care of its interests or issues. Instead, ‘[individual citizens] create their own political home’ by framing their own aims and channels for political action’ (p.28). Thus from this view, political action is,

The practice of responsibility-taking for common well-being through the creation of concrete, everyday arenas on the part of citizens alone or together with others to deal with problems that they believe are affecting what they identify as the good life (p.26).

Ultimately, political consumerism conceptualizes the individual consumer as an agent of political change (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti & Stolle, 2008; Nava, 1990; Scammell 2003).

Scholarship on anti-consumerist activism is relatively sparse and the little research that exists is often more laudatory than critical (Littler, 2009). Conceptually, the place occupied by anti-consumerism in the broader lifestyles of activist practitioners is missing (Binkley, 2008). In other words, there have been attempts to understand the ethical and political content within anti-consumerist movements but there are limited

attempts to link social theory to the political subjectivities of anti-consumerist activists. For some ‘political shopping cannot rectify the wrongs committed by multinational corporations’ (Micheletti, 2003, p.3). Writers like Day (2005) argue that lifestyling should be combined with other tactics that are “more obviously ‘political’ in nature” (p.21, emphasis in original), yet this simply highlights a broader debate about what constitutes ‘the political’. Political consumerism is controversial in part because it signals a shift in our conventional definition of politics. Jurgen Habermas (1981/2008) argues that new conflicts are emerging that can be characterized as having a shift ‘in values and attitudes ... from ‘old politics’ ... to ‘new politics’ (p.201). Old politics, revolving around issues of economic and social security, focused on solutions that could be provided by the state; while new conflicts, focusing on issues of quality of life, self-actualization and human rights, are no longer easily resolved through an individual’s relationship with the state (Habermas, 1981/2008). In this case, the efficiency of political consumerism can be easily misunderstood (Micheletti, 2003), as questions emerge about the nature of politics and political action. To further explore the connections between the individual and political action, the chapter now reviews the literature on contemporary social movements.

The ‘New’ in Social Movement Studies

A whole series of alternative critical frameworks emerged in the 1970s and the 1980s, as part of what is commonly referred to as the ‘cultural turn’ in the field of sociology (Klandermans & Roggeband, 2007). The rise of counter-cultural politics during the 1960s and 1970s ‘disrupted the politics of class and nation and resulted in the

discovery of cultural-political identities as new sources of power' (Taylor, 2010, p.29). In this way, the cultural turn left a significant mark on the study of politics and social movements. In efforts to conceptualize the progressive social movements emerging at the time, theoretical distinctions were made between 'old social movements' and 'new social movements'. According to Alberto Melucci (1996), who coined the term 'new social movement', the 'newness' of new social movements is still an open question.

New social movement theory tends to adopt either a neo-Marxist (structuralist) or a post-Marxist (culturalist) approach (Buechler, 2000). In general, new social movement theory was a response to the economic reductionism of classical Marxism (Day, 2005). The primary concern for classical Marxists has been to define 'the preconditions of revolution by examining structural contradictions of the capitalist system' (Melucci, 1980, p.199). In this view, political revolutionaries within old social movements (OSMs) 'seek effects that one, are to be felt over an entire social space, usually a nation-state; and two, are expected to occur across a wide spectrum of social, political, cultural, and economic structures and processes' (Day, 2005, p.65). OSMs, which are commonly associated with politics of the labour movement, can be conceptualized as when,

A dominator imposes law, beliefs, a political regime and an economic system; the people submit to these impositions but revolt against them when their physical and cultural existence becomes threatened (Touraine, 1978/1981, p.78).

While new social movements (NSMs) are conceptualized as,

Non-instrumental, oriented towards civil society rather than the state and involve a focus on the symbolic politics of culture, lifestyle and participation rather than the centralized and bureaucratic politics of the nation state (Taylor, 2010, p.107)

Although there are various theoretical conceptions of NSMs (Habermas, 1987; Melucci, 1996; Cohen, 1985; Inglehart, 1990; Touraine, 1978/1981), Buechler (2000)

outlines some of the dominant themes emerging out of NSM theory. First, NSM theory operates with some model of ‘societal totality’ that provides the context for the emergence of collective action (p.46). Second, NSMs are seen to be historically specific ‘responses to the modern or post-modern order’ (p.46), which are seen to have increasingly invasive and controlling aspects over social life. Third, many theorists argue that these movements are ‘no longer rooted in class structure, but are rooted in other statuses such as race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation’ (p.46). Fourth, theorists emphasize the ‘social construction of collective identity as an essential part of contemporary social activism’ (p.47). Fifth, theorists argue that NSMs ‘[foster] a lifestyle politics in which everyday life is [...] an arena for political action’ (p.47). Sixth, NSMs maintain post-materialist values that are concerned with a ‘quality rather than quantity of life’ (p.47). Seventh, NSM theory allows for ‘cultural and symbolic forms of resistance’ alongside or in addition to other political forms of action (p.47). A final theme in NSM theory is that ‘organization is less a strategic tool than a symbolic expression of movement values and member identities’, as NSMs prefer ‘organizational forms that are decentralized, egalitarian and participatory’ (p.48).

NSM theory focuses on how the ‘crisis of modernity’, typically illustrated by the social, political and economic effects of globalization (see Beck, 1986/1992), has resulted in a shift in the orientation and form of social movements. It addresses a wide range of issues that cannot be reduced to class struggle, such as racism, patriarchy and the domination of nature (Day, 2005). Since movement adherents do not seek institutional engagement with the state, NSM politics are often ‘hidden in the form of alternative identities and lifestyles’ (Taylor, 2010, p.9). It is this particular concern over alternative

identities and lifestyles that NSM theory becomes useful in conceptualizing political consumerism.

NSM theory provides a framework for the ways in which political beliefs and political action are related, to the 'culture' and the 'patterns of being, belonging and becoming' associated with individual and collective identity (Taylor, 2010, p.80). It was Touraine who first located culture, as having a prominent role in research on social movements (as cited in Jasper, 2007). For Touraine, social movements should be the central focus of sociology as 'social relations emerge from social action and social movements are collective agents of social action' (Taylor, 2010, p.108). He argued that sociology, 'which traditionally looked for an underlying unity and order' (functionalism), must change its focus to the study of the 'constructions of identities' (as cited in Jasper, 2007, p.70). Touraine's cultural vantage point helped him recognize that 'collective players form new goals' and that 'these are never given by social structures or laws of historical change' (Jasper, 2007, p.70). In other words, collective action is not the result of 'natural forces' or of 'the iron laws of history'; but it is the product of the beliefs and representations held by the actors (Melucci, 1996, p.15).

Building on Touraine, Melucci (1996) argues that it has become evident in the modern order that 'social processes are products of actions, choices and decisions' (p.15). Melucci's greatest contribution to NSM theory is the importance he attributes to the role of the individual actor (Jasper, 2007). He argues that NSMs take the form of 'networks' in which individuals experiment in 'alternative ways of living and lifestyles that challenge the dominant cultural codes of society' (as cited in Taylor, 2010, p.109). Subsequently, 'goals and opportunities are defined by collective actors in an ongoing

process through which [a] social movement is constructed' (Taylor, 2010, p.109). In this case: 'collective action' is an 'ongoing process through which social actors [negotiate] and [construct] meanings'; 'struggle' takes the form of 'lifestyles that are viewed as important ends in themselves in a merging of private lives and public commitment', and thus, 'new social movements' are 'struggles over identity' (Taylor, 2010, p.109). In addition to these ideas, Melucci (1996) states that scholars cannot simply 'identify the action with that which the actors report about themselves', but it also necessary to take into consideration the 'system of relationships in which goals, values, frames, and discourses are produced' (p.15). He argues there is still an 'unexplored theoretical space' regarding the "ways in which actors 'construct' their action" (p.16, emphasis in original).

Although in a more radical sense than Touraine and Melucci, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) also conceptualize the links between social actor and social action. Writing from a post-Marxist perspective, they privilege 'difference over unity', 'historical breaks over continuity' and 'emphasize transgressive behaviors and ideas' (Tucker, 2010, p.52). They argue the central question in social movement studies should be how social movement participants are 'constituted as social subjects who can challenge dominant social codes and meanings' (as cited in Tucker, 2010, p.54). For Laclau and Mouffe, the answer lies in the sense of self, as a 'distinctive subjectivity' that is constituted through 'discursive practices', where 'meaning' becomes a principal site for struggles of power (Taylor, 2010, p. 45). The theoretical framework they adopt functions, in part, through a reconceptualization of Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony'. Hegemony is,

A simultaneously coercive and consensual struggle for dominance, seen in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Marxism's as limited to the context of a

particular nation-state, but increasingly being analyzed at the global level (Day, 2005, p.7).

Hegemony describes a ‘process through which various factions struggle over meaning, identity and political power’ (Day, 2005, p.6). Laclau and Mouffe, however, object to Gramsci’s assumption that “there must always be a ‘single’ unifying principle in every hegemonic formation” (as cited in Day, 2005, p.71, emphasis in original). Instead, every hegemonic order is ‘the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices’ (Mouffe, 2005. p.18). In this view, ‘political identities are formed through the growing realization of a common situation, and through the struggle to improve this situation’ (Day, 2005, p.71). Identities are ‘contingent, provisional, achieved and relational’ rather than ‘intrinsic to a particular type of person or life-experience’ (Taylor, 2010, p.45). In this view, the focus shifts away from political identities as expressions of a relationship between class and power, towards identities arising as an articulation of complex social, political and economic relations. Individuals are perceived to be social agents who might be engaged in many different groups or organizations with different conceptions of ‘the good’, but who are bound together by a ‘common recognition of a set of ethico-political values’—those of liberty and equality (Mouffe, 1992, p.235).

As a closing remark on NSMs, it is notable that even with the cultural turn in social movement theory, which drew attention to participant’s ‘emotional investment’ in new collective identities (Melucci, 1995), only the cognitive components of collective identity have been emphasized. A variety of key cultural concepts (e.g. identity, movement membership and culture, etc.) have been treated as though they were entirely cognitive, without having an emotional dimension (Jasper, 1998). It was only at a time when crowds and collective behavior, not social movements and collective action, were

the lens for studying protest, that emotions were central (Jasper, 1998). Such as it was expressed in Le Bon's (1895/1960) influential 'crowd theory'. Normal, reasoning individuals were depicted as being transformed in the presence of a crowd, becoming 'mob-like'—angry, violent and impressionable (Goodwin & Jasper, 2007, p.612). The more emotional a crowd, the less rational they became. As Jasper and Goodwin (2007) point out, 'the actual stuff of contentious politics—moral principles, stated goals, processes of mobilization, the pleasures of participation—was ignored' (p.614). There continues to be a stark contrast in social movement literature between emotion and rationality (Goodwin & Jasper, 2007). The result has been that emotions have remained unrecognized and untheorized, as they are still seen by many as irrational and hence invalid (Brown & Pickerill, 2009a).

However, James Jasper, author of *The Art of Moral Protest* (1997), argues that strong emotions accompany all forms of protest. In fact, 'there would be no social movements if people did not have emotional responses to developments near and far' (Jasper, 1998, p.405). According to Jasper (1998), emotion is an action or state of mind that makes sense when considered within particular circumstances. Emotion is a type of 'transitory social role':

A socially prescribed set of responses to be followed by a person in a given situation. The rules governing the response consist of social norms or shared expectations regarding appropriate behavior (p.400).

In other words, emotion always concerns the self and the relationship of the self to culturally situated others (Illouz, 2008). Importantly, emotions can be learned through social interaction, as they are constituted by shared social and cultural meanings (Jasper, 1998). As Jasper (1998) suggests, all social movements are affected by emotions, which

are usually reactions to information and events, as well as by more stable affective bonds and loyalties. Emotions accompany all political action, providing both motivation and goals (Jasper, 1997). Also, some argue that ‘affective solidarity’ is particularly important in NSMs, as they have diffused, horizontal networks in which many participants adhere to unconventional identities and personal/political commitments (Juris, 2008, p.65). Accordingly, any account of social movement activism that overlooks its emotional dynamics ‘risks a fundamental misunderstanding of the dynamics of collective action’ (Kim, 2002, p.159).

The NSM literature brings several key ideas to the analysis of alternative consumer networks and practices. By focusing on culture and collective identities, it allows for the understanding of ‘the processes by which identities emerge rather than viewing them as reflections of a group’s social position and economic and/or political interests’ (Tucker, 2010, p. 44). Noteworthy is its emphasis on analyzing the socio-historical conjuncture in which these networks emerge. Most importantly, NSM literature conceptualizes the individual as a ‘transformative and prefigurative agent’ who ‘articulates alternative futures in the form of new values, identities and lifestyles’ (Taylor, 2010, p.93). Finally, even though emotions remain undervalued in research on collective action they are an integral part of all political action.

Approaches to Identity Formation

Reviewing the theoretical understandings of identity will prove useful for conceptualizing VS, in part, as a process of identity formation. The two broad approaches to identity formation emerge out of psychological and sociological traditions. The

following aims to highlight distinctions between each approach. A classical psychological interpretation of identity can be found in the work of Erikson (1968), who builds on the staged-based theories of Piaget (as cited in Buckingham, 2008). As a theory of development, in which one progresses through a series of stages until she ‘becomes’ an adult, it tends to be very normative in its view (Buckingham, 2008). The approach emphasizes a proper progression through the stages, as a critical part of identity formation. While this is partly a psychological process, it is also a function of interaction with one’s peers. So identity is developed by the individual, but it also has to be confirmed by others (Buckingham, 2008). The psychological perspective has been criticized based on its views of human development as a universal process.

From a sociological perspective and in a traditional functionalist view of socialization, the young adult is considered to be ‘a passive recipient of adult influences’ (Buckingham, 2008, p.4). In this view, youth need to be prepared for adult life. The sociologist, however, understands that the nature of youth varies according to the social context (i.e. class, gender, ethnicity). Further, some researchers argue that youth are actually ‘a social and historical construct, rather than a universal state of being’ (Buckingham, 2008, p.3). While psychological and sociological views of identity formation differ, they are equally normative in the way that they theorize human development.

Amongst these broader distinctions between the psychological and sociological approaches to identity, there is a diverse body of research within sociology, social psychology and anthropology that conceptualizes identity in terms of a relationship between the individual and the group (Tajfel, 1981; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Cohen,

1994). This view assumes an intricate relationship between the individual and the social in that one cannot be separated from the other. Individual selfhood is an entirely social phenomenon (Buckingham, 2008). Goffman's (1959) notion of the self as a theatrical performance is a classic example of this view. Goffman, however, has been criticized for making a 'problematic distinction' between personal identities and the social identities, as though one may be more 'truthful' than the other (as cited in Buckingham, 2008, p.6).

In view of group identity, 'identity politics' refers to a group struggle over issues of power, social status and identity. Typically, individuals come together in defense of particular racial, ethnic, gender or sexual identities (among others) that have been oppressed by those who hold social power over them. As Buckingham (2008) suggests, 'identity politics is about transformation at the level of the group, rather than merely at the individual level: it is about identification and solidarity' (p.7). Butler (1990) has criticized identity politics for its tendency towards essentialism, in that it reduces an entire group of people to a single identity. Regardless of their differences in approach, it is useful to highlight the similarities between Butler and Goffman's understandings of identity; both assume identity to be 'a fluid, ongoing process and something that is permanently under construction' (as cited in Buckingham, 2008, p.8). It can be further argued in this case, that the individual performs their identity, as opposed to it being something they simply are. Ultimately, in this view, identity formation is conceived as socially constructed.

In a similar fashion, Giddens' (1991) conceives of self-identity as a 'project-of-the-self'. He (1991) argues that modernity has 'radically altered the nature of day-to-day social life and affects the most personal aspects of one's experiences' (p.1). Under the

conditions of late modernity, ‘traditions, cultures and communal ties’ have been replaced by a plethora of choice and, as a result the self must ‘actively choose, sustain and incessantly revise their narrative of identity themselves’ (Atkinson, 2007, p.538). There is a proliferation of choice as to how to lead one’s life, but there are no longer any authoritative guidelines on how to do so (Atkinson, 2007). For these reasons⁷ Giddens (1991) states that self-identity becomes a ‘reflexive project-of-the-self’, which consists in the ‘sustaining of a coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narrative’ (p.5). Thus, consequently, the primacy of ‘lifestyle’ has emerged. Giddens (1991) defines lifestyle as an ‘integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfill utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity’ (p.81).

Lifestyles are routinized practices, the routines incorporated into habits of dress, eating, modes of acting and favored milieux for encountering others [and] all such choices are decisions not only about how to act but who to be (Giddens, 1991, p.81).

The concept of lifestyle is often associated with popular media, consumerism and a particular class position (Craig, 2007). However in adopting this perspective one overlooks the issues previously mentioned, regarding lifestyle as a more generalized phenomenon, one essential to identity formation. The concept of lifestyle should not be dismissed as a form of narcissism, but should be seen as a process of imminent critique (Jary & Jary, 1995). Lifestyle choices become “patterns of action that differentiate people” where symbolic meanings are built into the structures and forms of everyday life (Chaney, 1996, p.4). Chaney (1996) takes a critical look at various social theorists

⁷ Giddens’ (1991) argument will be further developed within the theoretical framework. The impact of issues, such as risk and trust on various dimensions of identity formation in the late modern period will be discussed.

(Simmel, 1991; Fiske, 1989; de Certeau, 1984; Cohen and Taylor, 1993; Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1991) who take up the concept of lifestyle and from his analysis he draws out three themes: lifestyle as symbolic exchange, lifestyle as symbolic capital and lifestyle as symbolic processes. Lifestyle as 'symbolic exchange' suggests that lifestyles are a way of 'mediating technologies, [structuring] relationships and symbolic meanings' (p.48). The use of goods is not conceived as 'representations but as networks of relationships' (p.52). Lifestyle as 'symbolic capital' is related to the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and the idea that the accumulation of goods provides a form of social capital. Chaney (1996) adds to this by suggesting that lifestyle choices are not only about social capital, but it is about having a 'knowledge of how to discriminate within a world of goods' which becomes 'a further form of capital, this time symbolic' (p.57). Lastly, lifestyle as 'symbolic processes' is tied to Giddens' (1991) work, in that it is a processual part of the everyday. Lifestyle, as a symbolic process, becomes 'distinctive ways of being' (Chaney, 1996, p.76).

Symbolism is useful for conceptualizing lifestyle, as it creates a focus around the changes in meaning and significance of the goods and services of everyday life. In this way, then, these goods and services are being treated as 'symbols of attitudes that constitute a distinctive form of life' (Chaney, 1996, p.71). The concept of lifestyle maintains the interest of social theorists, as it reflects a re-evaluation of material culture, away from the monetary value of objects and towards their social or cultural value (Chaney, 1996). In this context, lifestyles and lifestyle practices result from individuals who manipulate and appropriate materials produced in mass society for individual purposes (de Certeau, 1984). Often, the concept of lifestyle is thought of solely in terms

of a superficial consumerism. It becomes a more powerful concept, however, if it is understood as ‘an organization of individuals with particular value systems’, while also embodying a sense of a more ‘collective expression of everyday existence’ (Craig, 2007, p.234). Lifestyle in relation to identity formation is a fitting way to conclude this section as it posits identity as fluid and socially constructed. Most importantly, approaching identity formation from a perspective of lifestyling highlights a link between consumption and identity. From this view, the concept of lifestyle emphasizes ‘the constitutive power of individual actors and actions’ (Chaney, 1996, p.73).

Conceptualizing Voluntary Simplicity

Locating the voluntary simplicity movement within a discourse of anti-consumerism draws attention to the political nature of its alternative consumer practices, positioning it as a form of activism. Furthermore, bringing together the literature on anti-consumerism, new social movements and identity formation enables this study to move beyond current conceptions of voluntary simplicity. In previous works, scholars tend to focus on the ‘practice’ of voluntary simplicity rather than the ‘experience’ of voluntary simplicity. It is here where previous scholarship has insufficiently addressed the potential of VS as a mode of political expression. The following chapter aims to address these issues by theorizing voluntary simplifiers as lifestyle activists in a period of reflexive modernity (Beck, 1994).

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Expanding networks of global governance, increasing importance of transnational corporations and continuous development in new information and communication technologies that enable instant communication around the globe provide a context for significant changes in the dominant forms of political-cultural identities (Taylor, 2010). The precise relationship between globalization and self-identity is highly contested, and gaining insights on voluntary simplicity, as both a political and cultural form, necessitates a consideration for possible connections between the two. The following outlines some of the changing relationships between social structures and social agents by looking at how ‘[global risks] overlap with social, biographical and cultural risks’ (Beck, 1986/1992, p.87). Drawing particularly from the work of social theorists Ulrich Beck (1986/1992, 1994) and Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991, 1994), the study situates voluntary simplicity within a socio-historical conjuncture known as a ‘late’, ‘second’ or ‘reflexive modernity’. The view is adopted that modernity itself is going through a period of modernization, which is transforming industrial society into a risk society (Beck, 1994) According to Beck (1986/1992), ‘risk society marks the dawning of a speculative age in everyday perception and thought’ (p.73). And although many are likely to be aware of the global influence over local activities, it is perhaps less evident that ‘day-to-day actions of the individual are globally consequential’ (Giddens, 1994, p. 57). Risk society raises questions that impact upon the individual both in the form of life choices and as moral dilemmas. The radical process of reflexive modernization, which gives rise to risk society, links the life choices made by individuals to systems of global scope resulting in a remoralization and politicization of the social world (Giddens, 1991).

This chapter sets up a theoretical framework for understanding voluntary simplicity, as a form of lifestyle activism in the late modern period. First, it looks at three dominant sources for the transition from simple to reflexive modernity: separation of time and space, the development of disembedding mechanisms and the reflexive appropriation of knowledge. Second, it discusses the production and consumption of risk during this period. Finally, it conceptualizes identity as a ‘reflexive project-of-the-self’ grounded in relations of trust, security, risk and anxiety. As a whole, the chapter establishes how these epochal changes in structure and agency set up a condition where consumption becomes a site for political action.

The Modernization of Modernity or a Theory of Reflexive Modernization

At the outset it should be clarified what is implied by reflexivity in the second modernity. It does not imply ‘reflection’ but rather ‘self-confrontation’ (Beck, 1994). Reflexive modernization means the ‘self-application of modernization to industrial society modernization’ (Beck, 1993/1997, p.26). In other words, reflexive modernization is produced with all the means and resources of modernity itself, with its science, its technologies, its information and so on—it is the ‘victories of capitalism’ that have produced the second phase of modernity (Beck, 1994. p.2). Ultimately, it is the ‘(self-) destruction [of] an entire epoch: that of industrial society’ (Beck, 1994, p.2).

According to Beck (1994):

By virtue of its inherent dynamism, modern society is undercutting its formations of class, stratum, occupation, sex roles, nuclear family, plant, business sectors and of course also the prerequisites and continuing forms of natural techno-economic progress (p.2).

From this view, modernity is in its third stage of social change comprising first, a pre-modernity then, a simple (or classical) modernity and finally, a reflexive modernity. So just as modernization has worked to dissolve the social structures of feudal society (and its privileging of rank and religious world views) to produce industrial society, modernization is now dissolving industrial society (and its privileging of science and technology) to produce a new and second modernity (Beck, 1986/1992). In order to understand the differences between simple and second modernity, we have to be able to account for the ‘extreme dynamism and globalizing scope of modernity’ (Giddens, 1990, p.16). The dynamic forces of modernity derive from the separation of time and space, the development of disembedding mechanisms and the reflexive appropriation of knowledge (Beck, 1994).

Time-Space Distanciation

New information and communication technologies (ICTs) continue to shrink space and speed up time, connecting all parts of the globe while at the same time, deeply re-structuring daily life. According to Giddens (1991), separating time from space permits ‘the condition for the articulation of social relations across wide spans of time-space, up to and including global systems’ (p.20). In the pre-modern setting, ‘ordinary activities of day-to-day life, time and space remained essentially linked through place (Giddens, 1991, p.17). Today’s means of instant global communication and mass transportation have re-organized this relationship so that, ‘action takes place at a distance’—‘absence predominates over presence’ (Giddens, 1994, p.96):

Modern social organization presumes the precise coordination of the actions of many human beings physically absent from one another; the ‘when’ of these

actions is directly connected to the 'where', but not as in pre-modern epochs, via the mediation of place (Giddens, 1991, p.17).

Information technologies have facilitated new forms of expression and connection among groups and the growth of new public spaces (Smith & Smythe, 2000). As globalization continues to touch large numbers of people in different societies, the sheer number of organizations and individual players with different points-of-view also grows. In this case, the Internet works to facilitate loosely structured networks and affinity ties that transcend geographical and temporal barriers. 'Networking is the ultimate mode of organizing diverse interests or common interests that have been imbedded in different lifestyle communities and cultures' (Bennett, 2004, p.112). The networked environment offers a new model for social organization that is radically decentralized, collaborative and based on sharing resources among widely distributed but locally connected individuals (Schor, 2010, p.151).

In the case of voluntary simplicity, support networks are frequently key to VS practices, as the means to 'live simply' are not explicit. Along these lines, 'virtual relationships across distances [are being] articulated with those in interpersonal, local contexts', otherwise known as 'glocalization' (Housel, 2006, p.196). The Internet can be used to research or share information about tools and practices; organize volunteers for a farmer's market or other community events, or communicate with friends and family. Most importantly, new communication technology plays a role in supporting the social cohesion, social interaction and socialization of the voluntary simplicity movement (Housel, 2006). Simplifiers are using ICTs to 'interact across space, culture, and class regarding their beliefs, values and concerns on the VS movement' (Cherrier & Murray, 2002, p.245).

The communication constitutive of the VSM, taking place across time and space, illustrates Giddens' (1990) idea that modernity fosters relations between “‘absent’ others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction” (p.18, emphasis in original). Social relationships no longer require face-to-face interaction, locales are thoroughly penetrated and shaped by social influences quite distant from them and, as a result, traditional societies have been freed from local habits and practices (Giddens, 1990). In other words, modernization ‘detraditionalizes’ ways of living, which were built into industrial society (Beck, 1986/1992). According to Giddens (1990), the key to understanding the modern shift away from localized and face-to-face forms of social life are ‘disembedding mechanisms’, such as money and technical or professional expertise.

Disembedding Mechanisms

Time-space distanciation cultivates a condition for the ‘disembedding’ of social systems, which is the second element of modernization. Disembedding refers to the “‘lifting out’ of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space” (Giddens, 1990, p.21, emphasis in original). Giddens (1990) argues there are two types of disembedding mechanisms; symbolic tokens and expert systems, both are abstract systems that penetrate all aspects of social life. Symbolic tokens are media of exchange that can be circulated across various contexts, the most prime example being money, and expert systems refer to any type of technical or professional knowledge that acquires authority in expression and influence. Most important is these mechanisms are wholly dependent on trust. For example, individuals trust that money, a symbolic token, is a means of credit and its standardized value will allow transactions with others, whom they have never physically met. In the

same fashion, individuals rely upon expert knowledges to organize the social environments in which they live—the food they eat, the medicine they take, the buildings they inhabit and the transport they use. ‘Trust brackets the limited technical knowledge that most people possess about coded information which routinely affect their lives’ (Giddens, 1991, p.19).

Corporate branding practices can illuminate how trust underlies a host of day-to-day decisions in late modernity. In the global economy, ‘intangible’ or ‘reputational’ capital can match or even exceed the value of material and territorial capital (Aronczyk & Power, 2010, p.7). Brands operate as a source of value in both a moral and market sense: ‘it simultaneously mediates subjective qualities, tastes and norms, while also mediating objective financial worth’ (Aronczyk & Power, 2010, p.7). In this case, corporations are constantly trying to manage their brands to show their operations and actions as socially and environmentally responsible, ethical and sustainable. Such expressions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to a gamut of practices adopted by corporations in attempts to show they care about the broader society and the effects of their business. Aronczyk & Powers (2010) argue brands are a form of ‘informational capital’ and ‘those fluent in the language—branding consultants, market researchers, creative gurus, industrial designers and ad agencies—have become the experts, and their expert knowledge a frame of reference’ (Aronczyk & Powers, 2010, p.9).

In the context of ethical consumption, public understanding and political struggles over environmental risks are hugely dependent on their articulation by modern media communication (McGuigan, 2006). Given it is much easier for large corporations to access widespread media power, CSR programs can often undermine a consumer’s

ability to decipher details of corporate branding practices and make ‘free choices’ (Littler, 2009, p.62). For example, a company may promote its brand as ‘green’ because it advocates the use of re-usable fabric grocery bags as an alternative to single-use paper or plastic bags, but it may not be ‘green’ in the realm of environmental ecologies (the use of pesticides in non-organic fabric) or social ecologies (by using overworked, underpaid and outsourced labor) (Littler, 2009, p.104). It is widely known that the production of many consumer products are connected to serious environmental damage, yet consumers rarely possess the knowledge to be familiar with the details of corporate ‘greenwashing’, overstated ‘green marketing’ or ‘green labeling’ criteria. These corporate branding activities arguably refer to little more than ‘minimal, tokenistic and loudly hyped [commitment to being green] while a company’s large scale or structural practices remain unreformed’ (Littler, 2009, p.105).

The modes of trust involved in modern institutions rest upon vague and partial understanding of expert ‘knowledge [bases]’ (Giddens, 1990, p.27). In the above example, promotional intermediaries (i.e. branding consultants) are the experts and the corporate brand is a type of symbolic token; both are abstract systems that ‘organize large areas of the material and social environment in which [consumers] live’ (Giddens, 1990, p.27). In a post-traditional order then, trust is vested not in individuals, but in abstract capacities like the transnational corporation and its brand. So consumers not only expect that a given product will be environmentally friendly, but they also expect a series of probable outcomes to derive from the products they consume. For example, consumers trust that they will not become ill by consuming foods made with artificial ingredients. Trust presumes a ‘leap to commitment’, a quality of faith which is specifically related to

absence in time and space (Giddens, 1991, p.19). Everyone living under conditions of modernity is affected by a multitude of abstract systems, and can ‘at best process only superficial knowledge of their technicalities’ (Giddens, 1991, p.22). Modern institutions are devoid of any local attachments. Thus trust is no longer based on things outside of the relationship such as kinship, social duty or traditional obligation, as it was in pre-modern times. The reason, however, individuals are able to take ‘a leap of faith’ and place trust in abstract entities is as a result of the third quality of modernization: its intrinsic reflexivity.

Reflexivity

The shift to post-industrial society has not simply been about a growth in data and information, or merely a shift in occupational categories but a transformation in the nature of capitalist society (Bell, 1973). Today’s ‘knowledge society’ represents a new form of capitalism—one where economic activity is bound up with information. There is much debate over what constitutes a ‘knowledge’ or ‘information’ society, but most can agree that it means the production, distribution and exchange of information has come to occupy relatively more economic activity than either agriculture or manufacturing (Mosco & McKercher, 2007). In this case, human capital replaces physical capital as the primary source of economic value, and information, communication, and technology serve as the foundation of post-industrial capitalism (Aronczyk & Powers, 2010). Subsequently, modernity is constituted in and through reflexively applied knowledge. Modernity’s reflexivity refers to ‘the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge’ (Giddens, 1990, p.20)

Giddens (1990) makes the distinction between two types of reflexivity, individual reflexivity and institutional reflexivity. In the first sense, reflexivity refers to action, ‘the reflexive monitoring of conduct [...] intrinsic to all human activity’ (p.20). In the second sense, reflexivity refers to knowledge and meaning; ‘it is a social activity that reproduces the structures of the social world’ (O’Brien, 1999, p.25). The modern form of reflexivity (second sense) is a historical outcome of social changes having affected both institutional and everyday contexts (O’Brien, 1999, p.25). Giddens argues “no knowledge under the conditions of modernity ‘is’ knowledge in the old sense, where ‘to know’ is to be certain” (Giddens, 1990, p.40, emphasis in original). That is to say, the late modern world is constituted through the constant application of knowledge yet it can never be certain that any given element of knowledge will not be revised. Institutional reflexivity is the ‘regularized use of knowledge about circumstances of social life as a constitutive element in its organization and transformation’ (Giddens, 1991, p.20).

The difference in the post-traditional form of reflexivity is the feature of scale of knowledge and information available to the modern subject. The everyday lives of individuals are related directly to processes and decisions that are global in their effects (e.g. the use of nuclear power, GM technologies), and the pre-existing forms of local control, through which knowledge and action were linked (e.g. religion, tradition), are now undermined by the growth of knowledge and expert systems (Abbinnett, 2003). Individuals are constantly being called upon to apply moral, scientific and statistical criteria to life-events they experience, in regards to, for example, their employment, relationships or health. Individuals have to make decisions on ‘the basis of a more or less continuous reflection on the conditions of one’s own action’ (Giddens, 1994, p.86).

The ubiquity of brands illustrates the post-traditional form of reflexivity. Brands are themselves a form of ‘informational capital’, governing corporate information and communication (Aronczyk & Powers, 2010, p.7). Brand owners collect as much information as possible about its consumers through marketing tools (e.g. customized databases, search-engine advertising, etc.), as means to develop the brand and strengthen the relationship with the consumer. In a similar way, consumer activists have learned the same forms of information, communication, and new media technologies that facilitate the development of global economic networks, can also be used to build global activist networks (Bennett, 2004, p.108). Margaret Scammell (2000) has observed:

As consumers, we at least in the developed North, have more power than ever. We have more money and more choice...we are better informed shoppers... consumer rights and interest groups... are now daily in our mass media. Environmental lobbyists and activists... have a clear and central place in public debate and have demonstrated their ability to score direct hits against multinationals: Shell and dumping of waste in the oceans, Monsanto and genetically modified foods, Nike and pay and working conditions in its third world suppliers’ factories (p.351-2)

It is easier than ever before to circulate information about controversial corporate behavior. For example, protestors or media crews can easily film or record images of sweatshop conditions of production and have it reach a wide audience of potential consumers. Corporate brand-bashing is expressed through books and films like *No-Logo* (2000), *Supersize Me* (2004) and *The Corporation* (2003), and is the topic of many newspaper articles and reality TV shows (Littler, 2009). The shift to a knowledge-intensive society provides alternative communication spaces in which information can develop and circulate widely.

Additionally, cultural practices like voluntary simplicity are constantly examined and re-formed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, and thus

constitutively altering their character (Giddens, 1990, p.19). Voluntary simplicity connects people at various levels: at an ‘individual level’ through common interests; on a ‘communal level’ through a growing number of organizations, libraries and periodicals; on a ‘virtual level’ through emails and the Internet; and on a ‘physical level’ through courses and conferences (Cherrier, 2003, p.7). It is a collectively managed and open-sourced process that allows knowledge to be transmitted rapidly among these networked individuals motivated to share ideas with each other (Schor, 2010). In this way, the VSM is continuously re-created in and through the social sharing of new information by its members.

Taken together, these processes—time-space distancing, social disembedding and institutional reflexivity—cultivate the social conditions in which alternative consumer networks, like the voluntary simplicity movement form. These networks form on the one hand, as a result of the ‘search for social and personal identities and commitments in a detraditionalized culture’ and on the other, as it will be shown, as an ‘[expression] of the new risk situations in the risk society’ (Beck, 1986/1992, p.90).

The Ascription of Risk

The consequences of modernity are becoming radicalized and universalized. As the contours of industrial society shift, both new opportunities and hazards come into existence; according to Beck (1986/1992), these are the contours of ‘risk society’ (p.15). While classical modernity can be characterized by industrialism, reflexive modernity is characterized by risk. Risk being ‘a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself’ (Beck, 1994, p. 21). The

concept of risk society designates a 'stage in modernity in which threats, produced so far on the path of industrial society, begin to predominate' (Beck, 1994, p.6). While the central conflict in classical industrial society was over the distribution of goods (income, jobs, social security), in risk society, this conflict is overshadowed by conflicts over how to manage risks accompanying the production of those goods (nuclear and chemical technology, genetic research and threats to the environment) (Beck, 1986/1992). Beck (1993/1997) argues, in fact, the institutions designed for 'overcoming' problems, are being transformed through the process of modernization into institutions for 'causing' problems (p.51). In other words, the industrialized solution to add 'more schools, more welfare institutions, more economic growth, more law and order policies, and so on [...] extend problems and produce new ones rather than [solve] them' (Beck, 1993/1997, p.53). In this case, questions are being raised not only about the limits of Western development, but also about existing standards for dealing with emerging global threats.

Risks today typically 'escape perception and are localized in the sphere of physical and chemical formulas' (toxins in foodstuffs or the nuclear threat) (Beck, 1986/1992, p.21). In the recent case of British Petroleum's (BP) release of oil into the Gulf of Mexico, a 2010 explosion on the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, resulted in extensive damage to marine and wildlife habitats not only spanning across borders but impacting future generations of wildlife ("BP oil spill", 2011). The BP oil disaster illuminates how the risks and hazards of today are different from dangers of pre-modern times through the global nature of their threat (the oil spill spans borders and has affected future generations of people, animals and plants) and through their modern causes (drilling for oil). They are risks of modernization. Further, the new quality of danger in

risk society can no longer be calculated according to old concepts of ‘accident’ and ‘insurance’, since ecological and high-tech risks are no longer tied to their place of origin, they endanger all forms of life and they will outlast the current generation (Beck, 1986/1992, p.22).

Adding to the ambiguity of postindustrial dangers, science’s monopoly on rationality is beginning to dismantle. Emerging risks not only escape social perception but also they cannot be determined by science (Beck, 1994). Modern expertise is oriented towards continual improvement, efficiency and a capacity to define issues with increasing clarity and precision. As a result, modernization has begun to extend its methods of inquiry and skepticism to its own foundations (Beck, 1986/1992). As discussed, reflexivity in modernity means expert knowledge can no longer provide certainty, as at any point in time knowledge of something can be undermined with new information. There are always competing and conflicting claims and viewpoints on matters of risk, resulting in a scientific framework constructed by ‘probability statements and ‘ethical points of view’ (Beck, 1986/1992, p.29). Climate change and global warming, peak oil and the energy crisis, pollution and biotechnology or profit and neo-liberalism are just some of the agendas framing contemporary discourse on risk and the environmental crisis.

For the case of voluntary simplicity, what becomes most important is that ‘living and acting in uncertainty becomes a kind of basic experience’ (Beck, 1994, p.12). Modernity has ushered in a period that undermines the ‘traditional parameters of place, kinship and locale’ as the anchors for making life choices (Taylor, 2010, p.84). Under these circumstances, new political forms appear based on ‘solidarity from anxiety’ (Beck,

1986/1992, p.49). Opportunities for action open up as conflicts emerge over questions about the nature of progress and the excesses of Western capitalism. Communities begin to organize around goals of sustainability and values of self-sacrifice. Giddens' (1991) 'project-of-the-self' is useful for conceptualizing voluntary simplicity as a new political identity which materializes under the conditions of late modernity. In this view, simplifiers are making decisions that have to be 'defended and justified against other options and lived out as personal risk' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.27). The 'do-it-yourself biography' is always a 'risk biography' because individuals are the only ones responsible for supplying the rules for their actions (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 3).

Projecting the Self

In risk society, individuals are confronted with an indefinite range of potential courses of action. Choosing among such alternatives is always an 'as if' matter, a question of selecting between 'possible worlds' (Giddens, 1991, p. 29). 'Traditions, cultures and communal ties' have been replaced by a plethora of choice and as a result, the self must 'actively choose, sustain and incessantly revise their narrative of identity themselves' (Atkinson, 2007, p.538). Giddens (1991) argues the 'self' is a construct grounded in mundane or practical sense of reflexivity, characteristic of all human action, and 'identity' is a construct grounded in the modern sense of reflexivity; 'using knowledge and information as a means of defining and ordering activity and one's presence in the social world' (O'Brien, 1999, p.32). For Giddens (1991), establishing trust is the condition for the elaboration of 'self-identity', as it enables contacts and

exchanges at a distance and simultaneously brackets or discounts possibilities that are irrelevant to one's self-identity.

The character of second modernity imposes many 'tensions and difficulties [at] the level of the self' which 'have to be resolved in order to preserve a coherent narrative of self-identity' (Giddens, 1991, p.188). At a psychological level, individuals must 'bracket out' the plurality of possible options available to them on a daily basis (Giddens, 1991,p.36). Otherwise, one would experience a form of paralysis, resulting from overwhelming existential questions about who one is and who one wants to be (Abbinnett, 2003). For Giddens (1991), this need for ontological security happens at a very young age because it serves as a 'protective cocoon' that individuals must maintain in order to carry on with day-to-day activities (p.40). Individuals develop this framework of ontological security through everyday routines of social interaction. As an example, the tenets of simple living offers a guideline as to how one might structure their day; perhaps, organizing one's schedule to allow time for meditation, cycling, shopping at a local market, meeting a friend for coffee or working on a simple living blog. In pre-modernity, traditional culture (or religion) played a key role in articulating those actions and ontological frameworks—'tradition offered an organizing medium of social life' (48). Thus eliminating much of the guesswork and the decision-making role placed upon the individual in planning and living one's life. In either context, everyday rituals can be seen as 'coping mechanisms' in providing a framework for reality (Giddens, 1991, p.46).

In risk society, individuals must have the capacity to filter out possible dangers and threats, underlying all social interaction, from the realm of practical consciousness. In this fashion, modernity has 'radically altered the nature of day-to-day social life and

has affected the most personal aspects of one's experiences' (Giddens, 1991, p.1). Trust becomes a necessary 'leap of faith' in first, caregivers, then more distant and mediated others and ultimately modern institutions and abstract systems (O'Brien, 1999, p.33). As noted, even the basic decision to consume food made with additives or artificial ingredients requires a certain level of trust, placed by consumers in food manufacturers that the product is safe to consume. In a more traditional context, perhaps one grows her own food or knows the local farmer, which in both cases, trust is based on first-hand experience. According to Giddens (1997), risks are integrated into the modern subject's daily life as 'background possibilities', and are distant from one's immediate concern (p.130).

So while 'the self' is managed at a practical level of reflexivity (mundane sense of reflection), 'the identity' of the self presumes a reflexive awareness (modern sense of reflexivity). In other words, 'self-identity' is not something that is just given [...] but something that has to be created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual' (Giddens, 1991, p.52). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that in fact, second modernity 'condemns individuals to individualization' (p.4). Individualization⁸ is the social condition where previously existing social forms, such as the categories of class, social status, gender and family roles disintegrate. Identity is no longer necessarily assigned by religion, tradition or the state thus it becomes a task for which the individual is solely responsible. Late modern subjects must,

⁸ Note that the concept of individualization is much different than the 'neo-liberal idea of the free-market individual', which assumes 'individuals alone can master their lives and that their capacity for action comes from within themselves' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.xxi).

Create [and] manage, not only one's biography but the bonds and networks surrounding it and [...] do this amid changing preferences and at successive stages of life, while constantly adapting to the conditions of the labour market, the education system, the welfare state and so on (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.4).

Thus, as noted, the primacy of 'lifestyle' has emerged and it is often considered to be a trivial pursuit, thought of solely in terms of superficial consumerism: lifestyles as suggested by glossy magazines and advertising images (Giddens, 1991, p.81). It becomes a much more meaningful concept, however, when considered to be a way of underlining the political dimensions of consumption and as an opportunity to increase points of entry into political life (Schudson, 2007). Consumer behavior is not strictly about self-interest, but can also be considered publicly-spirited. In this way, the VS lifestyle choice becomes an organization of individuals with particular value systems focused around minimal and alternative forms of consumption (Craig, 2007). Using the market as a venue to express political and moral concerns illustrates what Bennett (1998) terms 'lifestyle-oriented politics'. Building on Giddens (1991), Bennett argues that day-to-day actions, including consumption patterns, are an effective way to achieve political ends by using the market to influence public policy (as cited in Shah et al., 2007). Conceptualizing the late modern subject as a reflexively organized project, which is sustained through the constant reintegration of local involvements and global concerns, highlights the link between personal consumption and politics (e.g. choosing to take public transit in consideration of peak oil or consuming only fair trade coffee to acknowledge human rights issues). The next section ties together these ideas about the relationship between reflexive modernity and individualization, and it seeks to construct a theoretical framework for examining voluntary simplicity as a form of lifestyle activism.

Voluntary Simplicity as Lifestyle Activism

The influence of reflexive modernization over the organization of time and space, the structure of social relationships, and the application of knowledge and information, creates a social environment where new social movements, favoring pluralism of ideas and values, and constituted through segmented, diffused and decentralized networks, can flourish. Also, rather than freeing people in second modernity, liberating them from the constraints of nature and tradition, a new global ascription of risk emerges. In this case, conflicts arise around the consequences of modernization and the pursuit of profit and progress (Beck, 1986/1992). As a result, individuals living in a reflexive modernity, which is characterized by risk, modify lifestyle choices to express moral and ethical views on the current social, political and environmental circumstances. The conditions for modernization, the ascription of risk and the projection of self are three broad theoretical concepts informing the analysis of voluntary simplicity as a form lifestyle activism.

VS & Reflexive Modernization

Local and global networks, expressing the voluntary simplicity ethos¹⁰, are emerging to solve problems of economics, energy and ecology. The re-organization of time and space in late modernity has created a social condition in which social relations are disembedded from local contexts and re-embedded across broad spans of time and

¹⁰ Here I refer to downsizing, co-housing movement, permaculture village, art and craft revivals, environmental conservation and recycling, anti-nuclear demonstrations, urban cooperative, consumer frugality, and the like.

space. The very existence of voluntary simplicity is possible only through these first two conditions of modernization. The Transition Town Movement, for example, originated in Totnes, England, and has now spread to countries all over the world. Transition towns are optimistic, self-reliant and advocate 're-skilling, food sufficiency, renewable energy and the forging of social bonds at the community level' (Schor, 2010, p.181). It is a decentralized movement that operates without a 'blueprint' other than a process it recommends for communities that take up the challenge. Also, The Global Eco-Village Network (GEN) connects thirteen thousand diverse communities around the world (Schor, 2010). It is dedicated to practicing, teaching, and disseminating not just sustainability, but 'sustainability plus'; a way of living that gives more back to the earth than it takes through activities such as, planting, growing, saving, sharing, recycling, making and caring (Schor, 2010, p.182). These movements, both expressions of voluntary simplicity, are local and global in scale: they set broad, far-reaching goals and objectives, accessible to a global community through mediated networks, that are then appropriated by individuals and re-articulated at the local level. That is to say, the voluntary simplicity movement,

Connects different members of society through an intensive use of interactive communication across space, culture and social class [...] providing the opportunity for individuals with different cultural identities to interact in non-hierarchical modes of communication regarding their concerns beliefs and values about [simple living] (Cherrier, 2003, p. 6).

Reflexivity, the third element of modernization, refers to the susceptibility of social activity to chronic revision in the light of new information and knowledge. At a fundamental level, VS networks are constituted in and through the sharing of information and knowledge. For example 're-skilling' is a key component of the VS ethos, which

emphasizes the need for green upskilling, so individuals can be more self-reliant.

Informal educational networks have developed to foster permaculture, agroforestry, solar and wind energy, biofuels, and other new ways of creating livelihood and meeting basic needs through the acquisition of skills (Schor, 2010). On a mass scale, individuals are collaborating, sharing and exchanging, and making their knowledge freely available to others. The voluntary simplicity movement is simultaneously strengthened and transformed by its members' participation and sharing of information.

The dynamisms of modernity have created a social environment in which roles, identities, relationships, and practices of interaction have become increasingly fluid, detached from their conventional structural anchors, individualized, and detraditionalized. Under these conditions, social networks and communities help 'create feelings of belonging and solidarity and support for alternative ways of living' (Nelson et al., 2007, p.146). In fact, Schor (1998) argues such peer reference groups are necessary for the survival of the VSM in consumer society. Ultimately, reflexive modernization has bred new social movements, such as the VSM, which focus on the 'crisis of modernity' (Beck, 1986/1992) and are rooted in 'new patterns of being and belonging' (Taylor, 2010).

VS & Ascription of Risk

A central consequence of reflexive modernization is that the motor of social transformation is moving away from one of progress and profit towards one of side-effects and dangers (Beck, 1986/1992). Conflicts emerge around modernizing risks that coincide with the motor profit. Individuals have started to debate whether concepts of progress, prosperity, economic growth and scientific rationality are still correct (Beck,

1986/1992). Subsequently, a parallel economy to the ‘for-profit-market’ can be seen as emerging within the VSM. There is a mass social sharing of ecological knowledge, taking place within the submerged networks of voluntary simplicity. It has been dubbed ‘peer production’, but is more generally referred to as ‘nonmarket’, ‘commons’ or ‘social production’ (Schor, 2010, p.151). Ecological knowledge includes the expertise to farm in earth-friendly ways, to harness the power of the wind, sun and geothermal energy, to make products without toxins or heavy metals, and to reuse materials over and over (Schor, 2010). The voluntary simplicity ethos suggests the best way to do these things is by moving away from ‘proprietary systems of information and technology toward open-source mechanisms of knowledge transfer’ (Schor, 2010, p.148). For Schor (2010), a Harvard economist, the shift to a knowledge-intensive economy has implications for the ideal structure of enterprises and how they relate to one another. The emergence of the Internet, for example, has resulted in radically different economic practices that undermine the dominance of large corporate ownership with its restrictive access.

Decentralized or distributed production becomes more efficient as individuals and small groups connect through voluntary networks, rather than large command-and-control enterprises we call corporations (Schor, 2010, p.150-151)

To illustrate, consider the example of permaculture, which aims to revolutionize the modern agriculture system in a way that wastes less energy. Permaculture is a form of high-tech self-provisioning: it develops ‘high-value ecosystems reliant on the natural labour of plants and animals rather than polluting fossil fuels or arduous human labour, the two major inputs of recent agrarian systems’ (Schor, 2010, p.120). If placed within a context of mass social sharing, permaculture becomes as much a knowledge-based program as it is product-based. Rather than buying what one needs, practitioners are self-

provisioning based on a ‘do-it-yourself’ (DIY) knowledge base. Further, the labour involved is a ‘high-skill, high-productivity diversification out of the traditional market’ (Schor, 2010, p.120). Permaculturists are committed to open-source principles, sharing their newly found skills and innovations, and they recognize a potential in the small scale. As a whole, the VS trend in self-provisioning represents ‘a shift out of the conventional economy, and a commitment to alternative economic institutions and different kinds of markets’ (Schor, 2010, p.22)

As the risk society develops, so does the antagonism between those ‘afflicted’ by risks and those who ‘profit’ from them (Beck, 1986/1992). It can be seen through the example of permaculture (and there are many other examples within the VSM) that notions of progress, profit or success are being re-evaluated and re-interpreted. Voluntary simplicity, as an umbrella for all sub-categories of ethical consumption, illustrates how there is no longer one expert knowledge (scientific rationality) but many expert ‘knowledges’. Voluntary simplicity is working on the labels of Western progress and comes at this task with divergent approaches (urban cooperatives, eco-villages, homesteading, etc). According to Beck (1986/1992), the global ascription of risks which late modern subjects are born into is bringing about ‘communities of danger’—people are being forced together in a ‘uniform position of civilization’s self-endangering’ (p.47). In other words, in order to prevent hazards from nuclear energy or toxic waste or obvious destruction of nature, members of divergent classes, parties, occupational groups and age groups are organizing into citizens’ movements (Beck, 1986/1992, p.47). The risk society produces new antagonisms of interest and a new type of community of the endangered

whose otherwise political carrying capacity remains ‘an open question’ (Beck, 1986/1992, p.47).

VS & Projecting the Self

Old ways of life, instituted by religion, tradition or the state, are breaking down. Subsequently, self-identity in late modernity is a ‘non-linear, open-ended, highly ambivalent and ongoing process’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.xxii). As Beck & Beck-Gernsheim note (2002), it is not freedom of choice, but ‘insight into the fundamental incompleteness of self’ which is at the core of the individual and political freedom in the second modernity (p.xxi). In reflexive modernity, the normal biography becomes an ‘elected’ biography. Along these lines voluntary simplicity can be understood as the aim to remake the self as a ‘moral identity’ (Grigsby, 2000, p.147). ‘Overconsuming is judged to be a greedy and destructive practice that must be replaced with frugal, green, and grassroots community building consuming practices’ (Grigsby, 2000). In living more consciously and being aware of where and how goods are made, simplifiers are confronted daily with their values and self-identity as they are faced with making consumer choices (Nelson et al., 2007), thus making consumption a key tool in articulating one’s critique of consumerist culture. Simplifiers use changes in their practices and changed meanings for their practices to give immediate and tangible evidence that they have adopted voluntary simplicity. Hence,

By modifying their lifestyle, they express a personal transformation and affiliate themselves with the voluntary simplicity movement and with its submerged network communities. Those submerged network communities create a feeling of belonging and solidarity in relation to its members by allowing people to discover common interests and experiences (Cherrier & Murray, 2002, p.245)

As individuals become increasingly responsible for the ‘production’ and ‘management’ of their identities, new and various forms of lifestyle-oriented politics are emerging (Bennett, 2008, p.13). After disembedding the traditional, locally organized relationships and re-embedding them with new, distant and abstract relationships, self-identity becomes a ‘narrative of authenticity’ that is immediately linked to the moral and existential dilemmas of living in the present (Abbinnett, 2003, p.31). In other words, it is impossible to divorce the subjective experience of expressive selfhood from the political questions raised in late modernity.

Reflexive modernization and by extension risk society, brings with it grassroots movements which are creating new political boundaries.

The rational-choice, hierarchical, means-end model of politics has begun to crumble. It is being displaced by theories that emphasize consultation, interaction, negotiation, network: in short [an] interdependency and process character in the context of responsible, affected, interested agencies and actors (Beck, 1986/1992, p.199).

While some scholars argue for the inclusion of new forms of civic participation, such as socially conscious consumption and consumer activism (Bennett, 1998; Micheletti, 2005; Scammell, 2003 Klein, 2000), others are critical of this idea, as these are not traditionally organized politics but rather a politics of consumption centered on lifestyle choices. A notable work includes Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* (2000), which is built upon the thesis that an anti-civic epidemic is taking place in the United States and that current trends indicate younger generations have disconnected from conventional politics and government. Putnam’s (2000) study produced data demonstrating a decline in political party loyalties, levels of political trust, political knowledge, national identification, voter turnout and an increase in public cynicism (as cited in Bennett, 1998). In this way, Putnam’s thesis

confirms that late modern subjects tend to have ‘a diminished sense of obligation to the government’, ‘vote less’ and have a ‘mistrust of media and politicians’ (Bennett, 2008, p.14). However, this is not because they have passively withdrawn from society. Rather, the ‘psychological energy people once devoted to grand political projects’ is instead, now ‘directed towards personal projects of managing and expressing complex identities in a fragmenting society’ (Bennett, 1998, p. 755).

In conclusion, the new political identities of late modernity favour ‘loosely networked activism and address issues that reflect personal values’ (Bennett, 2008, p.14). Simplifiers are engaging in forms of political consumerism either by boycotting goods and services of companies whose actions or policies they consider unethical; by boycotting goods and services of companies that practice social responsibility; by reducing their consumption and reusing secondhand goods to help the environment; and/or by opting out of some areas of the market all together, such as growing one’s own vegetables over shopping at the supermarket (Nelson et al., 2007). The eruption of various alternative lifestyles and the growing awareness of contradictions inherent in reflexive modernity are producing new political forms. As late modern subjects search for personal identities and commitments in detraditionalized cultures, new social movements express the contemporary conditions of risk (ecology, peace, globalization) (Beck, 1986/1992). In this view,

Widespread changes in lifestyle, coupled with de-emphasis on continual economic accumulation in a complicated interweaving of reflexivity, widespread reflexive awareness of the reflexive nature of the systems currently transforming ecological patterns is ... likely to emerge (Giddens, 1991, p.222).

The concepts, foundations and instruments of politics are becoming unclear, open and in need of a historically new determination, and this invites a fresh theoretical

perspective (Beck, 1986/1992). It is with this intent in mind that the study will conceptualize voluntary simplicity as a form of 'lifestyle activism'. Building on the concepts of reflexive modernity, risk and the project-of-the-self, this study will frame voluntary simplicity as a new social movement, in a period of great transition characterized by risk, constituted through the reflexively made consumer choices of late modern subjects. The concept of lifestyle activism is used here to distinguish voluntary simplicity; first, as an indirect (as opposed to direct) form of activism; second, as situated within the new social movement literature (as opposed to a form of identity politics) and finally, as a politics of consumption, expressed through lifestyle choices. Within a framework of 'lifestyle activism', it suggests that although sometimes concealed, voluntary simplicity is a form of daily political practice.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter provides a discussion of my approach to exploring how simplifiers fashion a sense of identity and construct new meanings and relationships to consumption. I draw on a dialogic/performance model of narrative analysis to examine field texts that emerge from participant-observation at *Transition Ottawa* meetings, which is a local expression of voluntary simplicity. I also include a discussion of my experience in the field.

The Case of Transition Town Ottawa

The objective is to study voluntary simplicity within a ‘real-life context’ in order to produce a richly contextualized and embedded conception of the VS identity (Yin, 1989). A ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) not only involves producing a detailed description of the context, people, and process of the research, but also the meanings and intentions of its participants. In order to provide a descriptively rich account of the VS lifestyle, the aim must be to illuminate how the lifestyle choices of simplifiers ‘are produced and reproduced or changed by examining their ongoing interaction with other elements within [a] particular context’ (Snow & Anderson, 1991, p.153). I contend the best way to do this is through an observational study of the group meetings for *Transition Town Ottawa* where individuals gather to discuss and affirm VS lifestyle choices (Johnson, 2004).

Transition Town Ottawa (henceforth Transition Ottawa or TTO) is a local chapter of the *Transition Network* and is based in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. TTO describes itself as,

An informal place where those interested in a more sustainable, more self-reliant way of living, can gather to exchange ideas, share resources, learn from what others are doing, become inspired, encourage each other, and come together as part of the larger transition network. It is a grand and ambitious social experiment (Transition Ottawa, 2011b, para. 2).

Transition Ottawa was recognized as an official ‘Transition Town’ in 2009 (Transition Ottawa, 2011a). The first ‘transition town’ originated in Totnes, UK in 2006 and is now just one of 382 transition initiatives across the globe (Transition Network, 2011).

Transition Town Totnes began as an effort to address the twin issues of climate change and peak oil by drawing on ‘the collective genius of the local community’ to build resilience through the ‘process of relocalizing’ all aspects of life (Brangwyn & Hopkins, 2008, p.10). According to Hopkins, co-founder of *Transition Town Totnes*, transition communities organize around values relating to a ‘rich social life’, local food sources, public transportation (as opposed to individual vehicle ownership) and locally generated electricity through community-owned wind, solar and hydro schemes (as cited in Hopkins & Lipman, 2008, p.18). Transition towns are self-organized, grassroots communities that are ‘making do’ by learning to re-use, recycle and repair used goods and by creating local economies based on organized trading and exchange with each other for money, local currency and favours (Hopkins & Lipman, 2009, p.18) (see also Appendix A).

While *Transition Ottawa* focuses on key issues of sustainability, it does so through a strategy of simple living. According to Elgin (1981) ‘living simply’ involves:

Embracing frugality of consumption, a strong sense of environmental urgency, a desire to return to living and working environments which are of a more human scale, and an intention to realize our higher human potential—both psychological and spiritual—in community with others. The driving forces behind voluntary simplicity range from acutely personal concerns to critical national problems (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977, p.2).

Transition towns are ‘new communities’ that are the ‘result of real work undertaken in the real world with community engagement at its heart’ (Elgin, 2011, para. 2). In this way, *Transition Ottawa* is a rich scene (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) from which to study the VSM.

According to Snow & Trom (2002) a movement case study is constituted, in part, by empirical and analytical focus on a movement as a ‘whole’ or ‘instances’ of it. In the case of the VSM, there is an assortment of ways to adopt the simple living ethos. As Elgin (2007) points out ‘simplicity is not simple’ (para. 8):

The growing culture of simplicity contains a flourishing garden of expressions whose great diversity—and intertwined unity—are creating a resilient and hardy ecology of learning about how to live more sustainable and meaningful lives (para. 20).

There are various approaches to leading a simple life; the approaches taken by members of *Transition Ottawa* are illustrative but in no way essential representations of the VS lifestyle. It is in this way that I treat *Transition Ottawa* as local ‘instance’ (Snow & Trom, 2002) of the voluntary simplicity movement.

Narrative Inquiry

This project did not set out with the objective of applying narrative analysis. Rather, through the research process, I discovered story-like qualities emerging from my observations at various TTO group meetings. Narrative analysis thus became a useful methodology for exploring the role of ‘stories’ in the construction of identity; but it was also clearly an approach that encouraged reflexivity on my part, as a researcher. The

habits of mind that are central to narrative inquiry¹¹ resonated with my own sensibility and with my goal of remaining committed to exploring researcher and participant subjectivity. As a neophyte researcher, I have found narrative inquiry to be characterized by several analytical lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods. In reviewing the literature, it quickly became evident a narrative approach encourages researchers to explore different ways of understanding both the production and analysis of qualitative data (Gilbert, 2008).

Susan Chase (2010) provides five analytic lenses outlining contemporary narrative inquiry. First, narrative researchers treat narrative¹² (written and oral) as a ‘distinct form of discourse’ (p.214). Narrative is a way of understanding one’s own and others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time (Bruner, 1986; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1995). The general approach offers my study a way of understanding how knowledge is constructed in the everyday world through an ordinary communicative act—storytelling (Reissman, 2008).

Second, narrative researchers view narratives as ‘verbal action’—as doing or accomplishing something (Chase, 2010, p.214). Whatever the action (explain, entertain, inform, defend, complain, etc), the understanding is that when someone tells a story, he or she ‘shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience, and reality’ (p. 214). As a

¹¹ I use the term narrative *inquiry* to designate ‘Big-M methodology’ (genre of qualitative research e.g. case study, ethnography or narrative inquiry) and narrative *analysis* to designate ‘little-m methods’ (construction and analysis of field texts) (Luttrell, 2010b, p.162)

¹² I use *narrative*, *account* and *story* interchangeably to refer to series of talk that are taken to describe or explain matters of concerns to participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009)

result, the investigator's focus is not on what may or may not be factually accurate about the narrator's statement. Rather, its focus is upon the narrator's sense of self and experience as it gets constructed in the story. The emphasis is on 'what' the narrator communicates and 'how' she communicates it and within what context, marking the particularity of a narrator's voice. From this view, the theoretical concept of identity can be linked to a process of storytelling—'identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)' (Reissman, 2008, p.8). This approach privileges a concern over particular actors, in particular social places, at particular social times, highlighting the socio-cultural and historical situatedness of the VS lifestyle.

Third, narrative researchers view stories as both 'enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances' (Chase, 2010, p.214). In other words, accounts are socially organized and the process of storytelling is shaped by the cultural, political, and economic context of the time. Chase (2010) argues the 'possibilities for self and reality construction' are limited to what is accepted within the parameters of the narrator's community (local setting, social membership, and cultural and historical location) thus drawing our attention to how an account develops and operates within a given social context (p. 214). Although each narrative is particular, researchers use this analytic lens to mark distinctions and locate patterns that emerge during particular times and places. It is through this lens that narratives can be viewed as doing political work (Reissman, 2008). Reissman (1993, 2008) argues personal narratives can encourage others to act, as can be seen in sites where social movements are forming. Stories circulate as groups use them to mobilize others and to foster a sense of belonging.

Narratives are strategic, functional and purposeful. Reissman (2008) states that ‘speaking out invites political mobilization’ and is essential to activism (p.8).

Fourth, within this tradition narrative is a ‘socially situated interactive performance’—as produced in this particular setting, for this particular audience, for these particular purposes (Chase, 2010, p. 215). Researchers argue that the narrator and audience jointly construct the narrative. Here, researchers emphasize that the narrator’s story is ‘flexible, variable, and shaped in part by interaction with the audience’ (Chase, 2010, p.215). Narrating is an interactive process of jointly constructing and interpreting experience with others. Thus narrative inquiry will enable the study to examine participant roles in negotiating meanings.

Finally, the fifth analytic lens adopted by narrative researchers is viewing ‘themselves’ as narrators (Chase, 2010, p.214). Chase (2010) argues the previous four lenses can and should be applied to the narrative investigator, not just to the research participants. As narrators then,

Researchers develop meaning out of, and some sense of order in the material they studied; they develop their own voice(s) as they construct others’ voices and realities; they narrate ‘results’ in ways that are both enabled in their disciplines, cultures and historical moments; and they write or perform their work for particular audiences (p.214).

The narrative approach offers insights on the identity work people engage in as they construct themselves within specific local contexts, treating ‘narrative as lived experience’ (Chase, 2010, p.216). In addition to this, the narrative perspective views stories as ‘social artifacts’, telling us as much about society and culture as they do about a person or group (Reissman, 2008, p.105). Taken together, these key components of narrative inquiry develop links between ‘biographical particulars’ and the social, cultural

and historical circumstances ‘shaping the range of possibilities for self and reality construction in any particular time and place’ (Chase, 2010, p.222-231).

Participant Observation

The purpose of my study is to begin to understand the ways in which lifestyle activists construct, internalize and realize new meanings of consumption. In this way, participant-observation is distinct from other methods because it produces the most direct access to action ‘as the action unfolds in everyday life’ (Lichterman, 2002, p.121). Observing and listening to ‘how’ people talk in their own everyday setting, on their own time, provides an opportunity to glean the ‘everyday meanings, tacit assumptions, ordinary customs, practical rules of thumb’ that organize people’s everyday lives (Lichterman, 2002, p.138). It is in this way that participant-observation will provide insight on the rationales and motives informing the anti-consumerist lifestyle.

Angrosino (2005) suggests that observation was once thought of solely as a data collection technique employed primarily by ethnographers who thought of themselves as “objective researchers ‘extrinsic’ to the social settings they studied”(p.734, emphasis added). Now observation has become a ‘context’ in which researchers define themselves as members of the social settings they study, and it is argued that a relationship between the researcher and the researched forms in the process of interaction (p.734). Particularly in the case of narrative inquiry, studies now consider the investigator to be an ‘active presence in the text’ (Reissman, 2008, p.105), emphasizing the influence of ‘interaction’ over the construction of field texts. In this view, we learn by communicating (Tedlock,

1991), by asking questions, expressing understandings and forming relationships.

Building on this, Lichterman (1998) suggests,

We will understand more about not only social movements but volunteer groups and other informal public groups if we attend closely to what it means to be a member, what it means to be publicly involved (Eliasoph, 1998; Lichterman, 1996) by observing and participating in action as action is happening (p.403).

Thus it is through observing, participating and taking field notes that I can generate a rich description of the VS lifestyle, as these methods provide a greater potential in understanding subtle nuances about VS through firsthand experience (Tope et al., 2005).

There has been considerable debate in social research about the advantages and disadvantages of using ‘naturally occurring data’ versus the sort of ‘contrived data’ that results from formal interviews (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p.37). In this study, ‘naturally occurring’ talk is preferred for two reasons: first, ‘it offers accounts that are less apt to be formulated in terms and constructs’ that are provided by me as a researcher; second, ‘it better reflects the indigenous language, constructs, orientations, and diverse circumstances’ that condition the activists’ accounts (p.38). A major part of participant-observation is ‘talk’. It is imperative to note this kind of talk is distinct from talk elicited through interview-based strategies. Interview settings carry their own norms of interaction and elicit certain kinds of talk (Lichterman, 1998). Interview results are ‘actively constructed, collaborative, and situationally mediated’ (Holstein & Gubrium, 2009, p.37). Lichterman (1998) suggests that ‘we will be misled if we assume there is a straightforward connection between a moral vocabulary elicited during an interview, and an activists group life’ (p.411) If we take discourses and traditions articulated in interviews to represent the complete meaning of activism for activists, we miss the ‘proximate implicit meanings that may be at work in everyday settings for activism itself’

(p.411). Often, in referring to qualitative methods, participant-observation and interviewing are considered as interchangeable sets of practices. However, it is important to distinguish between these types of methods, as each of them, although often used together, produce different types of data.

Participant-observation is especially suited for asking questions about everyday, often taken-for-granted meanings of both consumerism and anti-consumerist activism. Lichterman (1998) has outlined the ways in which social movement scholarship has tended to view meaning ‘as an object of strategic action’ (p.402). The assumption is that activists create and project their meanings ‘very intentionally’ by projecting identities with dissenting views or enacting rituals of solidarity (p.402). Lichterman says that participant-observation has helped us understand these ‘explicit meanings’ with interpretive depth but that we can also benefit from participant-observation for attending to ‘implicit meanings’ in activism (p.402). Implicit meanings are the meanings that ‘activists tend to take for granted as they are innovating explicit ideologies, identities and rituals’ (p.402). Implicit meanings are not necessarily difficult to discern but activists may not discuss them readily in an interview (p.407), which provides support for this study’s adoption of observational techniques. As Lichterman (2002) observed in his own study of social movements,

Listening to stories group members told each other in those group settings was tremendously valuable. I learned these [group members’] ‘shared meaning’ of activism. Everyday meanings are easiest to find when we study everyday interaction (p.138).

Ultimately, my purpose here is to highlight the value of participant-observation as a primary method, an end in itself for studying lifestyle activism.

Participant as Observer

Researcher roles in observational studies are typically categorized according to Gold's (1958) classic typology of 'master roles'—complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant and complete observer—to help researchers articulate distinctions between the extent of participation and observation within their research projects. In this context my role most resembles a participant-as-observer. Unlike the complete participant, the participant-as-observer 'does not operate as a member fully integrated into the routines and subjective realities of the group' (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.146). It includes a 'greater degree of reciprocity' thus distinguishing my role from that of the complete participant, who adopts an insider role through covert observation (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p.264). Lindlof & Taylor (2002) argue this role has gained increased legitimacy, in part, as a result of the general 'decline of traditional myths about objectivity' (p.148). There is an increasing acceptance of the benefits generated by researcher's immersion and inclusion in the scenes they study (Tedlock, 1991; Lichterman, 2002; Angrosino, 2005).

Perhaps even more useful, however, is Adler & Adler's (1987) model based on 'membership roles', as it more accurately describes the role I played in the field. When I first entered the scene, I adopted what would be my role naturally (whether I intended to do research or not) which was a novice and someone new to the group. Adler & Adler's model is premised on the belief that there is no such thing as 'pure observation' and that we should not define our research roles according to degrees of participation (Angrosino, 2005, p.733). All observation involves participation in the world being studied—there is no 'pure objective, detached observation' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.643). Instead, we

should articulate in our writing the extent of our involvement according to membership roles. Adler & Adler's model recasts Gold's 'complete participant' and 'participant-as-observer' roles into three new roles: 'complete member', 'active member' and 'peripheral member' (as cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.151). From the standpoint of a 'peripheral-member-researcher', one can develop an 'insider's perspective without participating in those activities that constitute the core of group membership' (e.g. contributing to the website, blogging, holding meetings, administrative functions) (Angrosino, 2005, p.733). Notably, in rejecting the duality of participation and observation, Adler & Adler (1987) argue that 'going native' will not happen so long as researchers continue to treat the experience of being with participants as an opportunity for theorizing (as cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.151). In either case, Gold's (1958) participant-as-observer or Adler & Adler's (1987) 'peripheral-member-researcher', both limit my place in the field to one role or another. In reality, situations change, roles shift and indeed at times it seems researchers carry on multiple roles (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Ultimately, my role in the field resembled a 'passive' participant-observer, who tried to operate as anonymously and unobtrusively as the scene permitted (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1955).

Fieldwork: Experiences & Challenges

Philosophers agree in making a deep distinction between the two ways of coming to know something. The first implies 'going all around it', the second 'entering into it' (Charmaz, 2004, p.980). According to Charmaz (2004), in this study's attempt to 'enter the phenomenon' of voluntary simplicity, I need to discover what is significant from the

viewpoints and actions of those who experience it (p.981). In this view, by opening myself up to experience, I create a space where the unexpected can occur (p.987). According to Goffman (1989), good ethnographers ‘relinquish conventional posturing’ and ‘risk being embarrassed and incompetent’ (as cited in Charmaz, 2004, p.987). He (1989) suggests ‘as graduate students ... [we] have to open ourselves up in ways [we] are not in ordinary life’ (p.128). I have outlined above the broad methodological framework of this study. However, qualitative-inquiry is designed in ‘the doing’ and depends a great deal on individual judgment (Luttrell, 2010b).

Making Contact, Gaining Access and Acceptability

In order to seek out sites where I could observe those adopting a VS lifestyle, it was necessary that I employ a ‘purposive sampling’ strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). *Transition Ottawa* holds group meetings open to the public, listed on its website as events categorized as being either a ‘discussion’, a ‘workshop’, a ‘presentation’ or a ‘meeting’, the last category typically consisting of social gatherings at coffee shops (Transition Ottawa, 2011c). The events are designed for open discussion and brainstorming on topics related to the transition and simple living discourses. According to Lindlof & Taylor’s (2002) criteria of suitability and feasibility, TTO meetings are a ‘suitable scene’ in which to perform my fieldwork (p.81). TTO meetings are an informal space for individuals to gather and discuss various topics regarding the experience of simple living. As an observational study of the personal accounts of voluntary simplicity, these meetings ‘encompass the criteria in the emerging research problem’ (p.81). TTO meetings are also a ‘feasible’ research setting given my available resources in time, money, skills and cultural capital (p.81). Meetings are open to all, do not require paid membership, and

occur sporadically according to when members post events online at the *Transition Ottawa* website, taking place in church basements, local coffee shops or at community centres throughout the city of Ottawa. In terms of having the required skills and cultural capital (i.e. the ‘coded knowledge’ constituting a scene) (p.83), my acceptance and ability to participate on the scene was not dependent upon membership, expertise, or a formal commitment to simple living.

Due to the open nature of the transition community, it was not difficult to make contact or negotiate access to the site. It was required that I confirm my attendance for the first meeting I chose to attend, as it was a ‘potluck’ (M1)¹³ and the group wanted to confirm who would be in attendance. I responded to the email address provided online requesting to know if the gathering was only for regular members or if it was suitable for new people. I received an enthusiastic response suggesting it would be ‘a good chance to meet other TTOers’ (personal communication, November 30, 2010). I experienced this same ease of acceptance at all group meetings. I introduced myself as a Master’s student at Carleton University doing research on alternatives to consumerism. I indicated that I was interested in attending group meetings for both personal and professional reasons, ultimately to inform my work.

Despite the welcoming nature of the community, I did face unique challenges in negotiating research relationships. All group meetings are publicly held and organized through the online community of which anyone can be a member. Due to the constantly

¹³ See Appendix B for details of each meeting. Meetings are labeled one through six (e.g. ‘M1’ ... ‘M6’). I have numbered textual sources such as newsletters in the same fashion (e.g. ‘N1’... ‘N15’). However, I do not include dates or references for any textual sources, as it could potentially reveal my participants’ identities.

changing dynamics of the group, in terms of who was in attendance (different members at every meeting), the group size and the types of meetings (more formal presentations or less formal workshops and discussion groups) it was very difficult to acquire informed consent at every transition meeting. To overcome the danger of identifying participants who did not explicitly agree to participate in my study, no personal identifiers are used in the thesis. Also I aimed to balance my role in the field in favour of observation over participation to play the least obtrusive role as possible. It was in the particular cases of the here and now with participants that ethics was situationally negotiated. As Calvey (2008) indicates, engagement with the ethics of research is not a ‘ritualistic tick box’ process that once done at the beginning of the project is then no longer necessary, rather it runs throughout the lifetime of a project’ (p.909).

Building Rapport

At the outset, novice field workers are encouraged to go into the field and start building rapport with participants. In general, textbooks seem to focus on the technical aspects of fieldwork such as gaining entry, contacting gatekeepers, taking field notes and exiting the field (Tjora, 2006). However, few studies offer insight about how to ‘manage impressions’, ‘establish trusting relationships’ with research participants and balance ‘closeness and distance’ within those relationships while in the field (Pitts & Day, 2007). Pitts & Day (2007) suggest this is because many of the skills we use to build rapport are those that we use in ‘regular, everyday encounters’ thus it becomes hard to ‘pinpoint strategies for development of rapport’ (p.195). In any case, some of the first and potentially most important steps that a researcher must take in the field are those related to rapport development with her participants. The first time I entered the field I played a

‘dual role’ of researcher and of someone ‘sincerely interested in the personal lives of others’ (p.180). While most researchers move beyond this ‘vulnerable observer’ position (p.180), I performed this balancing act for the entirety of my fieldwork. As a result, my experience in the field was accompanied by mild role anxiety.

Doing fieldwork was much more ethically and emotionally challenging than I expected. As a novice researcher, I felt that I was not yet completely comfortable with my role in the field. With hindsight I can account for many of my insecurities based on the challenges I faced in dealing with a fragmented community. I could not easily reconcile my feelings that ‘every’ member present at group meetings were not clear about exactly why I was there¹⁴. Other ethnographic researchers have also noted this ethical dilemma (Arber, 2006; Darra, 2008; Lofland & Lofland, 1984). In completing fieldwork, the issue over ‘just how far [one] should go to explain the rationale for one’s research to prospective participants’ always needs to be resolved (Darra, 2008, p.259). In part, to overcome these issues I kept a research journal to document my feelings about the work so that I would remain cognizant of how the field and relationships shaped my research. According to Arber (2006), keeping a journal ‘enables the researcher as an embodied presence to be tracked and placed within the research as an emotional feeling subject’ (p.156). In order to manage my struggles in the field it was important that I maintained a reflexive awareness about my research strategies.

Reflexivity

¹⁴ At many meetings the opportunity to introduce myself was not an option (e.g. presentation-style meetings). Also, my priority while in the field was to maintain an observer rather than participant role.

From the standpoint of a novice researcher, the ability to be explicit about why and how I made decisions will lend my research validity and credibility (Luttrell, 2010b). Adopting a reflexive methodology allows me to be explicit about what is ‘implicitly’ framing this study such as its purposes, assumptions, concepts and beliefs about knowledge (Luttrell, 2010b, p.7). Second, it acknowledges the ‘interactive’ nature of my research design (Luttrell, 2010b, p.7). This study has been constituted through interactions with the research environment, my strategy in constructing field texts and my on-going interaction with the research participants. Third this research process is ‘iterative’—it is a continuous back and forth process rather than linear (Luttrell, 2010b, p.7). As Agar (1996) suggests:

You learn something, then you try and make sense out of it, then you go back and see if the interpretation makes sense in light of new experience, then you refine your interpretation, and so on. The process is dialectic not linear (p.62).

Finally, a reflexive methodology makes room for the ‘imagination’ necessary in synthesizing a relationship between data and theory, to recognize patterns, significance and meaning in bodies of data (Luttrell, 2010b). I have aspired to be as reflexively aware as possible in order to make ‘the research process visible at multiple levels’: personal, methodological, theoretical, epistemological, ethical and political (Luttrell, 2010b, p.4). I do this because the study is developed within an interpretive framework having the view that knowledge is socially constructed. Accounting for my social background, my relationship to the field site and my theoretical and political leanings is crucial for knowing the limitations and the strengths I bring to the study, ultimately shaping the project. I seek clarity and transparency about each decision I have made at each stage of the project.

Towards a Pluralistic Approach

My research followed an open-ended process. It was not random and unfocused, but was executed without a predetermined outcome (Taber, 2010). I began with a very specific research question and research plan and by engaging in a dialectic inquiry, I adapted my research as applicable. My analysis emerged from my research and developed significantly as I moved into the analysis and writing stages (Taber, 2010). The following is a summary of how, ultimately, I analyzed the fieldwork data (research notes, observations, quotes from participants, etc.).

In the attempt to reduce ‘systematic biases’ within my interpretive strategies, I pursue both data and methodological triangulation (Maxwell, 2010). The study generated two overlapping bodies of data, each of which is associated with a different methodology. Field notes from my observations during *Transition Ottawa* group meetings are the primary body of data. I attended six meetings over a period of four months, each occurring at different times, locations and in different settings¹⁵. The second body of data comprises organizational documents. I gathered documents handed out at group meetings and those available through the online network. These include newsletters, pamphlets, business cards, fliers, and other textual materials. In addition to this, I draw on content from the *Transition Network* website as a further source of textual data.

In addition to using multiple data sources, I also use a within-method pluralistic approach to narrative analysis (Frost, 2009). Sometimes referred to as ‘within-method triangulation’ (Daymon & Holloway, 2011), it is the application of more than one

¹⁵ See Appendix B for ‘Field Sites’

analytic model to the data, leading to a multi-dimensional interpretation. I draw on a dialogic/performance model. This approach combines structural, content and context-based techniques of narrative analysis (Reissman, 2008). This approach to oral narrative requires a close reading of contexts, emphasizing that narratives are simultaneously situated in both the 'local context of talk' and the 'wider social context' (Phoenix, 2008, p.66). A general principle of the dialogic/performance approach is that 'investigators carry their identities with them like tortoise shells into the research setting', and as a first-time researcher, it is imperative that I reflexively interrogate my influence over the production and interpretation of narrative data (Reissman, 2008, p.139).

The primary goal of this study is to develop a thick, detailed, holistic elaboration of the VS lifestyle. I use a variety of narrative methods in order to gain a broad and deep understanding of the material I observed and of the field texts that were generated. Most importantly, the narrative methods I draw on align theoretically with the study's view of identity as 'fluid and transient and intimately tied to particularities of time and place' (Freeman, 2006, p.137). In the next chapter, it will be shown that a VS identity is dynamically constituted in relationships and performed i.e. constructed and reconstructed in and through social interaction.

Chapter 4: Field Texts: Analysis & Discussion

Analysis

In everyday conversation, ‘stories are told for a reason and they fulfill multiple simultaneous functions’: sharing personal news, entertaining listeners, revealing attitudes, constructing identity or inviting counter-disclosure (Norrick, 2007, p.127). What does it mean then, when several people, at different times and different places, having various social and cultural backgrounds are telling essentially the same story? In the field, I was part of an audience for several naturally occurring stories. I observed different storytellers expand and suppress particular scenes of a narrative, while each version still ‘maintained a shared underlying plot, the same primary foci of interest, substantial overlap in narrative statements concerning what happened and even wording repeated more or less verbatim’ (Norrick, 2007, p.138). Schegloff (1997) rightly observed that ‘people tell stories to do something: to complain, to explain, to boast, to alert, etc.’ and that ‘recipients are oriented not only to the story as a discursive unit, but to what is being done by it, with and through it’ (as cited in De Fina, 2009, p.235). Storytelling is more than a process of retrieving information from memory and verbalizing it in narrative form. Stories help ratify group goals and values and can demonstrate membership and group cohesion (Norrick, 2007).

In some general sense, the questions of meaning, significance and purpose of a narrative are questions about ‘who’, ‘why’, ‘what’, ‘how’, ‘context’ and ‘form’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In discussing the patterns, narrative threads, tensions and

themes across the lived experiences of members in the transition community¹⁶, this chapter is divided into three sections—thematics, narrative structure and linguistics. In addition to this, the discussion section of this chapter takes issue with the context in which these stories were produced, which is an important component of the dialogic approach to narrative inquiry. These first three sections work together to ‘narratively code’ my field texts in terms of the types of characters, events and storylines they comprise. It is shown how apparently ‘innocent’ narrative and linguistic features are actually heavily value-laden and perform an important role in constructing a discourse peculiar to the transition movement (Askehave, 2004, p.28). My analysis shows that members of the transition community organize around a shared sense of need for emotional support, in order to cope with pressing environmental issues and the experiences of sustainable living.

Thematic Analysis

I did not realize at the time of writing that the topic of my first field note entry would be a dominant theme of the entire study. The entry was about one of my first interactions with a *Transition Ottawa* member. I assumed the views expressed during our conversation, had to be an exception, as they seemed extreme at the time. I met Melissa¹⁸

¹⁶ I use the term ‘transition community’ to refer to members of *Transition Town Ottawa* (TTO), *Sustainable Living Ottawa West* (SLOW), *Sustainable Living Ottawa East* (SLOE) and *Sustainable Living Ottawa Centre* (SLOcentre). As a means of convenience each group organizes meetings in particular areas of Ottawa. Meetings are also organized for members of all groups to attend together. Note, however, that anyone can attend any meeting.

¹⁸ To protect the identities of my research participants, all names used here are pseudonyms.

²⁰ I constructed synopses of the stories I encountered while in the field (Cain, 1991). ‘Excerpts presented as quotations from meetings are reconstructions taken from notes I

at the first Transition meeting I attended. It was also her first meeting. Her reason for attending, other than to support her husband, who was already a group member, was to look for “people who believe in the lifestyle beyond ‘oh that’s cool’” (M1). She and her husband were looking to mingle with ‘like-minded people’. Melissa described how she would make attempts to talk to her friends about the peak oil and climate crises, but that ‘people don’t know what it’s about’ (M1). Melissa is a stay-at-home mom with two children. Her husband, Ron, has a PhD and does professional research on topics related to the energy crisis. I explained that I was a graduate student interested in consumerism and consumer culture, but that I was also hoping to gain a better understanding of how to live in a more sustainable way. This framing of my subjectivity clearly resonated with Melissa who opened up about her own experiences in trying to do the same in a deeply personal way. The following is an excerpt from my field notes regarding Melissa’s account of her own experience with this tension²⁰.

[Melissa] cried as she expressed feelings of guilt over her children having to live through such horrible times. She told me she feels selfish for having ‘two’ children. Melissa believes that because her second child was born with a heart condition, perhaps it was a sign she and her husband should not have reproduced. She appeared to carry a lot of guilt (M1).

I sympathized with Melissa as she recounted her feelings of guilt for wanting to bring children into a ‘horrible world’ that was veering towards environmental catastrophe.

Although the emotional dimension of Melissa’s account was unique, her rationale for wanting to live a more sustainable life was not. Indeed, to my surprise, Melissa’s

wrote up after each meeting. I believe the reconstructions to be fairly close to the original, and I have tried to capture both what was said and the contours of how it was said’ (Cain, 1991, p. 247).

account was only the first of several to address the anxiety associated with the ‘ought-to’s’ and ‘should-do’s’ of living a sustainable lifestyle. The most common remark people made about their experience of transition to sustainable living was feeling overwhelmed. Group members frequently expressed feelings that ‘there seems to be no great hope for [the] planetary solution’ and that ‘the problems feel too big; the issues too complex for [their] attention span, [their] ability to comprehend and [their] ability to act’ (N2). Today, there is a wealth of information about sustainable living and even more views on how to interpret that information. It became apparent that the transition community organizes itself, in such a way, so as to be a support system for its individual members. As one member puts it, the group is designed to help each other find ways to,

Meet with compassion and inner strength the oftentimes overwhelming amount of information of destruction, loss of irreplaceable species, land forms poisoned, and on and on ... everyday, day in, day out ... be it across the ocean in Japan or closer to home ... to move from apathy to compassion, from fear to creative energy... (N4).

The dialogue within the transition community is organized around the feelings of angst experienced by its members. Discussions often explored the tension between knowing what to do, in order to create a sustainable lifestyle, and actually following through with those daily practices. At one particular group meeting, we were asked break into groups of three or four, in order to discuss the following questions: ‘How do we feel about the crisis we’re in?’ ‘In what ways do we feel responsible?’ ‘What can we do to change?’ (M2). In my group, there were three of us: Pete, Michael and I. Pete, a thirty-something, young professional, runs some of the smaller meetings within the transition community. The meetings he organizes are often social by nature, a space to discuss informally the goal of creating self-sustaining cities. In response to the above questions,

Pete explained how he leads a ‘fast-paced lifestyle’ and that he is ‘guilty of getting caught up in the rat race’ (M2). The other member of my discussion group, Michael, is forty-something, married, and is from Europe. He was attending his first meeting with his wife Janet. *Transition Ottawa* was recommended to them by friends, who attend meetings in a nearby city. Michael and Janet had only recently moved to Ottawa from overseas and were looking to socialize with other advocates of sustainable living. Michael is well versed in the discourses of peak oil and climate change and carries an expertise in renewable energy and green building design. His comments in the discussion framed North America as a laggard compared to Europe when it comes to adoption of green technology. Michael explained how he and his wife have yet to find a home that is ‘reasonably insulated’ and that meets their personal green standards of design (M2). After our discussion, we were asked to return to the larger group and share our ideas. The following field note excerpt highlights how another member of the group responded to the same questions.

One woman recounted a story about a particular summer when she worked on her garden, trying to prepare as much as she possibly could for the winter. At one point, she recalls thinking, ‘I can’t keep going like this—it’s too much work’. Now, however, she realizes by putting in the time and working hard, she can enjoy the ‘fruits of her labour’. Now she and her husband have more time and money and they are going to the grocery store less (M2).

In all three accounts, a story was told about what members feel they ‘should’ be doing. Pete feels guilty about living a fast-paced lifestyle. The woman from the larger group expressed resentment over how much work was involved in order to live more sustainably. Notably, she was happy in the end about taking the necessary steps, so she could eat locally year-round, as well as avoid the grocery store. Even in Michael’s case,

he expressed a sense of frustration about the lack of green technology in his new home.

The basic group take-away that day was,

We should not think about transition as having a 'deadline', but rather as something we work away at. ... people feel [transitioning] is something 'they have to do', but the group advocates people 'should not think about it in those terms' ... the focus needs to be on the positives rather than the negatives (M2).

Most interesting is the way the discussion questions were framed, by those who organized the meeting, as having an emphasis on one's feelings, emotions and personal experiences. "How do we 'feel' about the crisis we're in?" "In what ways do we 'feel' responsible?" "What can 'we' do to change?" (M2, emphasis added). In my observations, patterns of broad sensibilities emerged, characterizing the members of the transition community as anxious about the infinite sources of information required to properly live a sustainable lifestyle. In fact, of all the patterns emerging from my observations, it was the way members characterized their feelings about living simply that was most prominent. An excerpt from the SLOWest newsletter speaks to this sensibility.

Most SLOWesters are tracking news events with wide eyes these days, trying to make sense of the torrent of economic and ecological info that's coming at us. Most of the data presents itself as analysis and is digested by the mind, naturally enough. But of course we also have visceral responses, feelings that take time to work through, and decisions to make based on what we're reading and seeing (N6).

Jasper (1998) argues emotions are the raw materials from which mobilization can be built. According to him, 'we can be socialized (or not socialized) into appropriate feelings in the same way we learn or do not learn our local culture's belief and values' (398). Thus in adopting Jasper's view, the emotions of being overwhelmed, fearful and anxious are not best seen as barriers to action; rather, they can be seen as forming the

‘raw materials’ for sympathy and recruitment to the VS movement (Goodwin & Jasper, 2007, p.618).

If we adopt the view that it is affect and emotional responses that ‘political organizers appeal to, arouse, manipulate and sustain to recruit and retain members’ (Jasper, 1998, p.405), it can be argued that the transition community is attractive to its members (and potential recruits) in its appeal as an emotional support system for those aspiring to live simply. As a participant observer, I was careful to avoid asking questions specifically related to my research topic. I decided, however, at one of the last meetings I attended, to ask for any advice they might have for a ‘first-time transitioner’. Firstly, the presentation that day, was made by a family who had decided to transition ‘together’ rather than on their own, as individuals. A family of five, the Brown’s started their transition two years ago, as the result of a high school science project that was assigned to the family’s daughter. Julie, now nineteen, spoke of how devastated she was in learning about industrial food production systems. She dramatically recounted how one evening she was unable to sleep and ran into her parent’s bedroom, crying and stating they must do something. The next day, Susan decided to research what it was her daughter was so concerned about. After two weeks of discussion, the family decided to begin its transition, but together as a group-effort. Susan explained how she was going to need the support of the whole family in order for change to happen. The changes they made were primarily oriented around food consumption. The family, three of whom attended the transition meeting, all emphasized the importance of recognizing that people transition at different paces. They joked about how, George, the children’s father, still cannot give up *Kraft* peanut butter (M5). They shared many tips and tricks about how

others can make their own homes self-sustainable. An excerpt from my field notes describes how they answered my question.

I asked the family if they had advice for someone who was new to the transition concept. I asked which informational sources they relied on when they first decided to transition. I also asked what their first steps were. In terms of useful resources, George and Susan replied they went back to what they used to do when they were married thirty years ago. For example, Susan said, 'I used to make yogurt'. They said it helped that they both had some knowledge of how to work with food. For example, knowing how to 'cook an egg' or 'make white sauces'. This knowledge gave them confidence in working with 'new and unknown vegetables', which was necessary to shop locally year-round. Julie added that she stopped reading the 'calorie intake' on food boxes and tried instead to 'demystify the marketing' by learning what the ingredients were. She quickly realized how many she couldn't pronounce (e.g. she said 'the Mueslix cereal box only appears to be healthy'). At this point in the discussion, another girl from the group spoke up and suggested I read the book, 'Sleeping Naked is Green' (Farquharson, 2009), as it would offer all sorts of practical steps for sustainable living. The young woman's comment prompted Susan, and she said 'whatever you do, pick one thing and start there—take baby steps'. Julie chimed in, 'because they will quickly turn into strides'. It's hard work and 'easy to feel overwhelmed' (M5).

If we think about the family sharing its experience of transition as a subtle form of recruitment, we can begin to see that affective ties, or emotional bonds, are influential within the transition network. Transition members continuously express how they are 'struck by the huge weight of the challenges' in shifting to a more sustainable lifestyle (N3). The family's story was a presentation intended to inspire others to make the transition despite its challenges. It was advised that I take 'baby-steps' so as not to be overwhelmed by the undertaking (M5). In their attempt to relate to me as a novice, the family disclosed their own feelings of being overwhelmed, and their ultimate decision to 'make the transition slowly', each at their own pace (M5). Poletta (2002) argues the stories activists tell one another are critical in mobilizing the emotions of confidence, that activists do extensive rhetorical work to transform emotional raw materials into specific beliefs and suggestions for action (Goodwin & Jasper, 2007, p.620). Thus solidarity is

mutually constituted; ‘mutual solidarity built from embodied experiences makes alliances between differently situated actors...’ (Sundberg, 2007, p.162).

Building on my observation that anxiety, fear and worry are present in the emotional lives of these individuals, my analyses revealed these emotions as also having a significant influence over the direction and structural shape of the movement. It could be said that if emotions are intimately involved in the processes by which people come to join a social movement then, they are even more obvious in the ongoing activities of the movement (Jasper, 1998). The excerpt below is from a thirty-minute podcast featuring two members of the transition community discussing current projects. The discussion suggests how the movement’s structure has been informed, in part, by its members’ desire to know how to manage the emotional experience of simple living. The respondent is speaking to the question, ‘Can you talk about how you got people involved or interested in these concepts and then tell us how SLOWest has developed up until 2011?’

We had a first sort of large public gathering ... and about 70 people came out that day ... we basically used a very common approach of sharing people’s experience but then inviting folks to identify what they really cared about and what they were interested in working on and to go for it. ...A group emerged quite strongly wanting to put energy into ensuring that we paid attention to the inner dimension of change that people are going through, both individually and together. So all the psychological challenges of dealing with the overwhelming information and for many folks this is also part of a spiritual journey, as well (Pod1).

As this quote illustrates, the group views itself as playing a critical role in the process of ‘inner transition’—that of an emotional support system. In this way, internal dynamics of the transition movement are fundamentally tied to emotions.

At one particular meeting, a similar discussion was brought up regarding the vision of SLOWest and the subject of a ‘shared story’ (M3). The topic was evoked at the

end of a debate over how to mobilize others towards sustainable living. Bernard, a forty-something man, who has played a central role in developing the transition community, was asking, ‘how do we pepper our ideas and meetings on others, who may be just slightly interested or not even know they are interested?’ (M3). As Bernard elaborated, he emphasized how adopting the lifestyle can be overwhelming given all of the different outlets in which one can express it. He wondered aloud, ‘how do we break stuff down into chewable, digestible pieces?’ (M3). Here again, when members discuss the significance of the transition challenge, adherents place an emphasis on the supportive role the group can play in helping people maintain the lifestyle. Rose, a soft-spoken middle-aged woman, in response to Bernard, brought up the importance of having a ‘shared story’ (M3). My research notes from that encounter are illustrative:

They argued there is a ‘shared consciousness of why they come together’, but they need to embrace this in the form of a ‘shared story’. Rose suggested everyone has ‘difficult times and experiences that are all different’ but it is important to ‘give a name’ to what they have in common. At this point, Karen²¹ spoke of another group she once attended which she quickly realized wasn’t for her, because it consisted of ‘high-level discussion about the science and facts of what is happening [to the planet]’. She said she realized it was not what she needed. And that was okay. She needed a group like this, ‘something or some place where [she] could connect at this level’ that was ‘personal and meaningful’ for her (M3).

A community post on this topic, ‘the evolving vision of SLOWest’, was published online during the period of this study (CP1). Its significance lies in the way that it depicts transition communities as a support group for those adopting alternative consumer lifestyles. The following are four key elements of the sustainable living philosophy, as it was outlined in the post (N5). It claims to be, first, ‘a network ... for learning and

²¹ Karen is a prominent figure in the community, as a result of her active participation and contributions to the initial founding of the transition community in Ottawa. She is an educated, middle-aged woman who teaches yoga in her spare time.

experimentation about building and living in communities ... in ways that are environmentally sustainable, socially just and spiritually fulfilling...' (N5). Second, it envisions its neighborhoods as 'people places ... [developing] local food systems, and [growing] local economies and culture' (N5). Third, its members come together as 'diverse individuals in an organic whole' and finally, they 'nourish conversations that can transform at a natural pace into responsible action'. It is important to reference how members characterize the group of which they are part. However, in observing the members and through a close textual analysis of what members say when they speak or write about the transition community, the emphasis is placed on the community as a source of emotional support. Observation is useful here, as a technique for distinguishing between what members say they do and what they actually do (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

The transition philosophy is rooted in the belief that consumer choices are fundamentally political. 'Your dollar is a vote' (M2) was an underlying assumption advocated at all group discussions. Take Sheila's story for example, Sheila is a thirty-something, young, active participant in the transition community who is known by most as someone who has 'made' the transition. She often speaks of her one-year hiatus from buying anything new. *Adbusters'* (2011a) holds its annual 'Buy Nothing Day', while Sheila took the challenge for a whole year. The only exception she made was for food. Most shocking, according to the group's reaction when she told the story, was her decision to use re-usable toilet paper. Old cut-up t-shirts worked fine in lieu of the regular disposable toilet paper. She now likes to refer to herself as an 'urban homesteader' whose aim is to live in a 'household of production rather than consumption' (M2). Now, she

only makes purchases according to the *Buy Sustainable Challenge* (One Green Generation, 2008). Before buying anything new, she asks herself five questions: First, does she really need it? If so, can she buy it locally? If not, can she buy it fair trade? Or can she buy it green? And, will the product last—is it of good quality? Sheila ended her talk that day by stating, ‘the choices around what we eat are extremely influential so vote with your fork everyday!’ (M2) Sheila’s ‘transition story’ underscores how the transition community assumes their consumer choices to be political—this is obvious for them. Hearing this story was a turning point for my study, because it became clear that political consumerism was only playing a small part in the lifestyles adopted by these consumers. Something else was bringing them together in attendance at group meetings.

What became most interesting was that I was encountering people in different places, at different times, and with divergent backgrounds, who were telling essentially the same story. A story involving a protagonist who is alone and overwhelmed by the infinite sources of information about a future global crisis. A dramatic tension builds as one tries to find and maintain lifestyle balance²². The protagonist then finds comfort in other like-minded people who are also trying to achieve balance, as a way forward and a source of change. Transition members are continuously telling a story about individuals coming together in support of one another. Or, in their own words,

Instead of individually being overwhelmed by all the information and challenges out therewe come together as diverse individuals as an organic whole ... shaping healthy, hopeful channels into which we truthfully and creatively bring

²² It is noteworthy that all members of the transition community—men and women—drew on this ‘generic’ narrative to account for their experiences of sustainable living. There was no evidence of a gendered component in any of the stories told about simple living or in the composition of the community.

our fear, urgency, resistance, courage and excitement about what is happening on our planet ...(N5).

Next, I have grounded my observations and thematic analysis, both of which are highly interpretive, in a structural analysis of the narratives I encountered while in the field.

Structural Analysis

I draw here on William Labov’s (1972) analytic model as a point of departure for understanding how simplifiers tell stories about the experience of simple living. Labov’s paradigmatic model suggests that a fully formed narrative includes six common elements: an abstract (summary of the substance of the narrative), orientation (time, place, situation, participants), complicating action (sequence of events), evaluation (significance and meaning of the action, attitude of the narrator), resolution (what finally happened) and coda (returns perspective to the present) (as cited in Reissman, 1993). Each element, in this classic form of a story, has a function and in considering how the text hangs together narratively this approach offers a way into the interpretation of meaning. So while personal narratives depend on certain structures to hold them together, they may be put together in contrasting ways and, as a result point to different interpretations (Reissman, 1993). Particularly, in evaluation clauses, the teller steps back and comments on the events she is describing infusing the story with values and meaning. Labov (1972) argues that narrators say in evaluation clauses how they want to be understood and what the point is. So events become meaningful because of their placement in a narrative.

Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 display my structural analysis of field texts I acquired while on the scene. Table 1.2 is a representation of the prototypic story that appeared across my sample of field texts. Labov’s structural elements are identified in the left-hand column, their function is listed in the middle column and illustrative examples from my

field texts are in the right-hand column (Reissman, 1993). It is a composite that combines accounts of simple living from several participants. In the initial stages of my analysis, I sensed there was a similarity in the way participants talked about their lifestyles. So not only were there reoccurring themes emerging at the different group meetings, in terms of discussion topics and ways of positioning one's self in relation to the group, but there seemed to be a particular 'way' of talking about these things that was commonly adopted by the group. At that time I did not realize that these stories actually follow closely the same time-evolving plot and draw on similar rhetorical devices.

The narrative structure presented in Table 1.1. is a blueprint for the plotline that stories about simple living tend to loosely follow. There are, of course, deviations from and adaptations to this model; however, its broad storyline was present in all of my field texts. Speaking strictly to its structural form, narrators tend to embed personalized stories about one's own struggles and victories in living the lifestyle, within a larger narrative characterized by the simplicity ethos²³. I introduce the following excerpt, from a SLOWest newsletter (N1), because it succinctly sketches the 'broad' transition storyline, in which, members insert their own personalized stories. In this instance, I have included a coding scheme for means of reference.

01	AB	The earth has a non-negotiable need for rest and rejuvenation,
02	CA	in order to continue,
03		just as we all do.
04	OR	So what does this mean?
05	EV	A balance between SLOW and intense perhaps?
06	RE	Each of us must decide for ourself.
07		It's hard to deny that the stakes are high.

²³ E.g. Living in environmentally sustainable, socially just and spiritually fulfilling ways.

In Labovian terms, the first clause functions as an abstract for the narrative. Stories about VS tend to use a metaphor as a way of organizing the narrative, one that often creates a relationship between the planet and human beings (line 01 & 03). The orientation clause (line 04) is typically a brief statement about the topic of discussion. It can appear both before and after the abstract²⁴. Orientation to the time, place and situation are less prominent in transition stories. The exception tends to be in more elaborate and often personalized stories, in which case, orientation clauses function to characterize the narrator and her identity. The second clause (line 02) carries the action forward (complicating action) by highlighting a sequence of events—‘in order [for the earth] to continue’. The crisis or turning point in transition narratives occurs as a result of coming in contact with information regarding critical issues²⁵. The complicating action serves to highlight key issues so the narrator can then provide his or her evaluation of that issue. The evaluative clause (line 05) creates a moral framework through which to understand the given issue (e.g. ‘balance between slow and intense perhaps?’). It is the narrator’s opinion. In transition stories, often, there is no resolution to the narrative—likely, because the issues of climate change and peak oil have yet to be resolved. If there is a resolution to the plot, it takes the form of ‘suggested practices’ offered by the narrator. In this basic story, the plot is resolved by suggesting ‘we must decide for ourself’ (line 06).

²⁴ As a nonnarrative clause, the orientation clause can be moved around without disrupting the basic narrative structure (Norrick, 2007, p.129).

²⁵ The text is not included in its entirety; however, the narrator is responding to information about *Earth Overshoot Day*, also known as, Ecological Debt Day (EDD). EDD is ‘the day on which the earth regeneration from all sources is overtaken by resource use from all sources’ (N1). This information prompts the narrator’s account. The clause ‘in order to continue’ is representative of the narrator’s confrontation with an informational source.

The transition plot can be developed further in light of stories members tell about their own personal experiences of simple living. The excerpt is an example of the personalized stories members embed within broader narratives about transition²⁶.

- | | | |
|----|------|---|
| 13 | AB | In a Restorative Circles facilitator practicum I attended in |
| 14 | OR | Rochester in September, Don asked us, ‘Where are your favelas?’
My favelas, the places where I see conflict and from which I want
to run, are everywhere – at home, in my family, at work and school
and in community. |
| 15 | CA | But after two years of experimenting with walking toward conflict
in a restorative way, |
| 16 | EV | I have found that it creates a sense of safety in me to experience
being with conflict. |
| 17 | | In fact, I am beginning to look forward to conflict |
| 18 | | (to be honest, not at all times, but in moments, and that feels good). |
| 19 | Coda | Don once observed two people arguing. |

Once more, we see the narrator use a metaphor to organize her story i.e. a favela²⁷ (AB). The protagonist is characterized as fearful or overwhelmed by ‘her favelas’— ‘places ...from which [she wants] to run, are everywhere’ (OR). As was shown, in the generic transition plot, the complicating action is always a result of the protagonist coming in contact with information. In this case, the transition member took part in a ‘facilitator’s practicum’ on resolving conflict. Typically, as is the case here, members embed a personalized story about the experience of transition, within the broader generic transition plot. Within the embedded and personalized stories, the action is carried forward by the protagonist ‘taking a step’ towards a more balanced lifestyle. In this instance, the member ‘walks towards her conflict’ rather than running away from it (CA). Any action the protagonist takes tends to be evaluated in positive terms i.e. ‘I have found

²⁶ See Table 1.1. and Table 1.2 regarding ‘Embedded Narratives’.

²⁷ The narrator describes favelas as, ‘shantytowns in which 60% of the Rio population lives and to which the police do not go’ (N7)

it creates a sense of safety ... and that feels good' (EV). As the audience, we are encouraged to see the positive results of taking action; we only need to take that first step. In this example, the reference back to Don signals the end of the narrator's personal story (Coda).

I present these two short stories²⁸ as exemplars in how narrative content and narrative form are working in tandem, to accomplish the transition movement's communicative aims. Structurally, the narrative is saturated with patterns that reinforce thematic elements (Reissman, 2008). The first short story (N1) is organized according to the broad storyline characteristic of the transition narrative, as mapped in table 1.1: We (I, you, us and our planet) are all interdependent (line 03) and we are in a state of crisis (line 02). To produce change we must achieve balance in our lives (line 05) and this requires each of us to act, and this will be at our own pace and in our own way (line 06). This sequential order is also adopted by transition members in their personal accounts of simple living. For instance, in the second story (N7), the narrator spends years experimenting in dealing with her 'places of conflict' (N7). And once she finally confronts those issues, she 'feels better', ultimately achieving a sense of balance. In all of the stories I encountered, personal change towards more simplified living, was positively reinforced.

Looking at recurrent narrative structures, it became evident that each account was put together in a similar fashion. The sequence of events unfolded in the exact same way across each member's story. The narratives always orient the audience to a set of characters, who are feeling overwhelmed, doubtful and anxious, initially becoming

²⁸ I only refer to two examples in my discussion. However, all of the themes discussed are documented further in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2.

paralyzed by the wealth of information about simple living practices and unable to act. Narratives are organized around events involving angst about making difficult lifestyle changes, but everytime an action is taken towards simple living, it is shown to be positively reinforced. In this way, the narrative structure is creating a moral framework for understanding the subjective experience of simple living. At the turning point in the narrative, the characters find balance once moving closer to the simplicity ethos, finding the necessary resources, comfort and support in the transition community. The specific and consistent narrative placement of key events (i.e. encounters with information, taking the first step) as complicating actions; which, are then consistently evaluated from within a similar moral framework, reinforces my observations made about the characters and plot in simple living stories. How the scene is put together narratively—main points, episodes, events—is the same across all of my field texts. Within the literature, when this happens—the persistence of certain conventional elements (Mitchell, 1990)—the text falls under some category of narrative genre.

Narrativization tells not only about past actions but how individuals understand those actions, that is, meaning (Reissman, 1993). Narrators indicate the terms on which they request to be interpreted by the styles of telling they choose. The basic notion of genre is the grouping of texts on the basis of certain shared features. For Labov & Waletzky (1967), the genre of ‘the narrative of personal experience’ could be identified by its structural properties: (1) the presence of a certain number of narrative components (2) the existence of temporal ordering and (3) the centrality of evaluation as a mechanism to guide story interpretation by the audience (as cited in De Fina, 2009, p.235). However, according to De Fina (2009), this ‘canonical narrative’ is not very common in everyday

talk and a great deal of narrative types escape the rigid principles of temporal juncture, tellability (recounting of unusual events) and evaluation (seen as the work of the teller) (238). For example, habitual narratives, hypothetical stories or anecdotes make it difficult to take structure as the main basis for the definition of narrative genres (238). De Fina (2009) argues we need to open up our definition of genre to include consideration of the interactional conditions in which narratives arise. In this view, narrative genres are understood to be ‘orientating frameworks, interpreting procedures or schemes that remain very general and on which people improvise in practice’ (238). Building on this, narrative genres can be seen as a ‘set of conventionalized expectations that members of a social group or network use to shape and construe the communicative activity that they are engaged in’ (Rampton, 2006, p.128). For Rampton (2006), these expectations include:

- (1) A sense of the likely task at hand
- (2) The roles and relationships typically involved in an activity
- (3) The ways the activity can be organized
- (4) The kinds of resources suited to carrying it out (as cited in De Fina 2009, p.238).

Next, I will continue to interrogate the transition narratives, but this time, by paying close attention to the broad spectrum of linguistic devices transition members use in constructing their stories (e.g. temporal markers, rhetoric and discourse devices). With the above discussion of genre in mind, it can be shown—thematically, structurally and linguistically—that simple living stories are a particular form of discourse constituted by its own generic rules. Thus in beginning to conceptualize it this way—as a unique genre of discourse, I will refer to it as ‘simplicity-speak’.

Linguistic Analysis

Firstly, a discourse—such as the transition discourse—is a ‘way in which a particular group of people use language in a particular way to promote their conception of truth or reality according to their particular ideology’ (Fairclough, 1995, p.135). That is to say,

Whether one’s ideology is expressed directly in the text or not, the choice of words, grammatical structures, text types, etc. contributes to a particular representation of the world and is thereby exposing the author’s ideological stance as well (Askehave, 2004, p.13).

Members of the transition community speak persuasively about their lifestyle choice through effective forms of symbolic expression. Language, as Burke (1950) said, ‘is not merely descriptive [...] not just trying to tell people how things are [...] it is trying to move people’ (p.41).

In this discussion, recontextualized words, metaphors and personifications, presuppositions, and collocations, that is, sayings or stock phrases appearing in simplicity-speak are all considered. To begin, note the particular way transition members remark about the development and future of SLOWest.

In August 2009, an evening conversation of about 30 people helped ‘plant the seeds’ and a few months later you could see and sense these ideas ‘germinating’ ... Over the course of the next twelve months quite a range of interests and project ideas ‘sprouted’ (N5, emphasis added).

We really feel the call to deepen our connections with each other and with the work we’re doing, so it’s got ‘deep roots and it doesn’t wither too quickly’ ... a lot of stuff ‘flourished’ in the space of 18 months, and we’re just trying to make sure we support it as best we can (Pod 1, emphasis added).

A salient linguistic feature of the transition discourse is recontextualizing words in order to exploit their ‘meaning potential’ (Fairclough, 1995). Transition members conjoin words syntactically with words and expressions related to organic processes found in nature, creating metaphorical links between humans and the earth. In doing this they

attempt to overcome the nature-humanity dualism through rhetoric. They adopt metaphors, which promote a ‘holistic vision’, metaphors that emphasize the place of ‘human beings as part of nature’ (Harre et al., 1999, p.96). Other environmentalists have also been critical of Western metaphors²⁹ for nature (Meisner, 1995). Meisner (1995) advocates the need for new metaphors that should be ‘provocatively powerful and cognitively practical; they must evoke positive feelings about nature and suggest a conception that leads to humility, respect and non-exploitative ways of living’ (p.16). In considering these and other metaphoric links further, we are able to see how transition members introduce their beliefs and set the scene for a particular worldview through the language they use.

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) suggest metaphors reflect the way we conceptualize the world we live in and that we often behave according to these conceptualizations (as cited in Askehave, 2004). In simplicity-speak, a commonly used form of metaphorical representation is personification. Personification is the giving of human attributes to an animal, an object or an abstract concept. A recent study on emerging ‘New Age Movements’ found that many spiritual discourses tend to use personifications to attribute either ‘negative actions’ (e.g. to limit, to impede, to block) or ‘positive actions’ (e.g. to help, to teach, to release) to abstract concepts (Askehave, 2004, p.23). The study showed how personified abstractions were viewed as being either ‘helpers’ or ‘opponents’ of the ‘good life’ (Askehave, 2004, p.23). Drawing on these ideas, we can see, in the case of the transition movement, that it is elements of nature, which are associated with human

²⁹ As an illustration, a transition member highlighted how the language we use for nature is problematic. Drawing on my field notes, the comment made was, “the term ‘natural resources’ suggests that we can take or use whatever we wish from nature, but this not the case—it is not just there for the taking” (M2).

action. Simplicity-speak personifies the earth, plants and animals, in such a way, so they are conceptualized as ‘helpers’ (Askehave, 2004) in the transition towards sustainable living. For example, one newsletter asks its readers to, ‘recommit to being attentive in taking nature as [their] steady companion teaching [them] how to be’ (N6). In this context, the earth is often referred to as someone who knows best—a mother.

We are being called upon by the sorrowing and powerful earth, our mother ... through her ... we learn the destruction of the old ways is essential for the birth of the new ... she steps into our lives and awakens us... She is calling upon us now each in our own way to do our inner work, to become her allies... (N9³⁰).

In other cases, the human-earth relationship is viewed as a continuous relationship where body and earth are one and the same. For instance, take one transition member’s quote from the monthly newsletter:

The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like the pond surface or forest soil, not a shell so much as delicate interpenetration. It reveals the self ennobled and extended ... as part of the landscape and the ecosystem, because the beauty and complexity of nature are continuous with ourselves ... we must affirm that the world is a being, a part of our own body (N9³¹).

These personifications are important ‘conveyors’ of the simplicity ideology, as they allow the author to construct sentences in which entities become important ‘doers’ of good and evil (Askehave, 2004, p.24). For example, representing an essential link between humans and the earth suggests a transition belief in the need to emphasize organic roots and the dependence of human beings on finite planetary resources. In other words, by discursively creating links between the planet and human beings, transition members

³⁰ A transition member has adapted this poem originally from *Healing and Empowering the Feminine: A Labyrinth Journey* (2003) by Sylvia Serensky. Only excerpts of the poem are included here.

³¹ A transition member is quoting from the book, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards A Council of All Beings* (1988) by John Seed, Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming and Arne Naess.

attempt to alter the way people talk about and conceptualize this relationship in order to promote change.

There are two levels of metaphor, a ‘cognitive level’ (i.e. conceptual metaphors), and a ‘linguistic level’ (i.e. the actual linguistic expression derived from the conceptual metaphor) (Askehave, 2004, p.18).³² As was seen, both thematically and structurally, the key event producing change in accounts of transition was expressed by the stock phrase ‘taking the next step’. This linguistic metaphor reappears systematically throughout my field texts and is used rhetorically to reflect the experience of transition. Consider the following examples,

Moving at an organic pace without pushing, ‘with steps taken’ when we catch a following wind and some people choose to join their energies to ‘step into action’ on what they care about (N5).

Getting engaged in changing things is quite straightforward. If we have an idea, or want to resolve an injustice, or stop a tragedy, ‘we step forward to serve’. Instead of being overwhelmed and withdrawing, we act (N12).

What is possible is for individuals to ‘step outside of the mainstream paradigm’ and consciously choose something more personally aligned for themselves (N13).

According to Askehave (2004),

[Given that] our language is mainly geared towards describing events, people, scenes, etc. we do not have a language which is adequate for a precise description of our ‘inner life’. The result is that people turn to metaphors and personifications to offer a more precise description of their feelings (p.23, emphasis in original).

Then, as can be seen in the excerpts above, the metaphor of ‘taking the next step’ stands in to represent a complicated and subjective process of ‘transitioning’, ‘spiritual growth’ and/or ‘lifestyle change’.

³² For example, the conceptual metaphor ‘Life is a Journey’ may receive a linguistic realization such as ‘We traveled the path of life’ (Askehave, 2004, p.30).

The final key linguistic device used in simplicity-speak is likely the most prominent feature of its discourse—its presuppositions about time. The transition movement can be classified as a type of environmental discourse and any discourse about the environment is almost always a temporal discourse (Harre et al., 1999).

Environmentalism, above all, links the past with the future. The present is always presented as the sum of the consequences of the past and the necessary platform for the emergence of the future (Harre et al., 1999). As Harre et al. (1999) point out,

To talk about the environment is to talk in temporal terms. A static and unchanging environment would hardly stir our interest, let alone our passions. To talk about nature requires us to formulate assumption or presuppositions about the temporal order(s) in which we believe ourselves to live (or we believe we once lived in before the ecological crisis ‘broke out’) (p.120, emphasis in original).

In order for members to describe and account for the experience of transition, a presupposed order of things, or ‘world,’ must be present (Marsen, 2006, p.249). Marsen (2006) argues that in a ‘presupposed world’, a ‘narrator has given form to an idea of what an agent and an action are, and of what an expected succession of events is’ (p.262). In other words, the narrator describes a set of interrelationships of narrative agents positioned in a way that reflects the narrator’s worldview (p.261). In this way, presuppositions about time have influence over the persuasiveness of transition beliefs about the current order of things. For example, the transition community consistently characterizes the current historical moment as ‘transient, fast-paced and forgetful times’ (N13), ‘times of uncertainty and change’ (N15) and as ‘a time of upheaval’ (N7). Building on this characterization, consider the following quote taken from the SLOWest newsletter; ‘Our present values and patterns of consumption are the architects of the present global ecological emergency’ (N13). The views expressed in this statement

reflect implicit beliefs, held by the transition community in its conception of the current historical moment. That is, 'the unlimited future is a subjective illusion' and 'objectively there are temporal limits to what is possible', in terms of progress and growth (Harre et al., 1999, p.121).

A second conception of time, consistent within simplicity-speak, is regarding transition members' 'growth in time'. According to the simplicity ethos, one's responsibility in this historical juncture is,

Becoming more powerful through intentionally slowing down, deepening and being in open stillness with one another and trusting that synergies will arise for doing small projects on ordinary things for collective impact ... moving at an organic pace, without pushing ... patiently allowing transitions, space between breaths, false starts and life cycles to happen (N5).

Interestingly these two most prominent conceptions of time, within the transition movement, are at odds with one another. Personal and community growth is supposed to be 'born and spread in a very organic fashion' (N4). Even though, according to the transition community, 'we stand at a critical moment in the history of the earth' (N1) when 'the current reality of earth [is] in severe crisis (N14). There is a contradiction within the transition discourse about the expected rate of personal change and the critical state of the environment. Transition members are only expected to change when 'the time feels right' (N15), yet the undertones of simplicity-speak is characterized by a strong sense of urgency. This tension, however, has also been noted in other environmental discourses. Harre et al. (1999) state that,

Both 'reasonable time' and the correlative 'strict time limit' reflect a constant feature in almost all environmental discourse: the evocation of dramatic time pressure ... [T]his self-localization of environmental discourse [is] within a process that 'runs out of time'. It endows the tentative discourse with a characteristic dramatic undertone (p.130, emphasis in original).

According to Harre et al. (1999) we can discern ‘three levels of meaning, implicitly representing three levels of knowledge, by which we express our beliefs about the sequential ordering of events’—natural time³³, cultural time³⁴ and individual time³⁵(p.121). Any discourse about the environment is about the relations between these orders of time, or more precisely, about ‘their distortion and the (biological, political, moral) necessity to recalibrate the lost balance’ (Brockmeier, 2000, p.58). Looking at how simplicity-speak situates the individual in cultural and historical time—as moral agents, individually responsible and needing to take action, in a period of crisis—it can be said that temporal references become ‘moral assessments’ (Harre et al., 1999, p.7). The narrative model transition members use, expressing views and shaping visions of time, ‘encapsulate culturally normative views, patterns of experience and evaluations’ (Brockmeier, 2000, p.61). Most importantly, transition members are shaping themselves in time by way of a ‘cultural tool kit’, which they have discursively acquired as members of the transition group (Harre, et al., 1999, p.135).

Overall, this analysis reveals and reinforces— thematically, structurally and linguistically—that ‘accounts of simple living’ constitute their own narrative genre. In-depth textual analysis and observation have shown that transition members have a clear

³³ On this level we map event sequences using above all the dominant systems of chronology: calendar and clock time (a natural linear order of time) (Harre et al., 1999, p.122).

³⁴ On this level we find historical and cultural conceptions of time in which we must distinguish the time of narration from time of what is described or foreshadowed in that narration. To understand these grounds, we must frame time in terms of cultural-historical conditions, social and moral imperatives and historical semantics (i.e. historical context of linguistic meanings) (Harre et al., 1999, p.122).

³⁵ This level is the psychological and discursive domain of an individual’s construction of his or her own time: the individual ‘time synthesis’ that people express in their various life stories. Here, individual, cultural and natural time orders are meshed together and are dependent on each other (Harre et al., 1999, p.122).

sense of a ‘task at hand’— creating space that supports one’s own and others’ transition to sustainable living (Rampton, 2006, p.128). In telling about the experience of transition, members understand the ‘roles and responsibilities’ involved, how the activity of transition is ‘organized’ and what ‘resources it requires’ (Rampton, 2006, p.128). Within this framework of generic expectations, ‘tellers work to ratify their membership’ in the transition group (Norrick, 2007, p.139). As members recount their experience of transition, what becomes increasingly important is not the information itself, but the way of telling it. As a result, the transition group identity is made and maintained through specific storytelling practices (Reissman, 2008). If we recognize ‘accounts of simple living’ as having a distinctive style and structure, we can begin to see how the transition discourse serves as a mode of representation that its tellers intentionally choose. Different genres persuade differently (Reissman, 1993). Simplicity-speak invites us to care about the ecological crisis to varying degrees as it pulls us into its tellers’ point of view.

According to Harre et al. (1999),

The ‘crisis of our times’ is at root a discursive phenomenon. It comes about through a shift in our ways of seeing and assessing what we see, made possible by the taking up into our discursive resources new vocabularies, new judgmental categories, new metaphors and analogies that have prompted awareness of much that was previously overlooked (p. 4, emphasis in original).

In this way, we can begin to see how simplicity-speak may be paving the way for a new kind of rhetoric. One that places an importance on emotion to the sustenance of political organizing (Brown & Pickerill, 2009b).

Discussion

A great strength of the dialogic approach is its emphasis on the broader context. Narratives need to be studied as texts that get transposed in 'time' and 'space' (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Considering the historical and cultural context in which voluntary simplicity has emerged provides insight into the simple living discourse. Firstly, I argue the dynamics of modernization are producing a different society. As Beck (1986/1992) suggests, the dynamism of business, politics and science is dissolving industrial society as a 'context of experience' (p.134). People are being freed from the certainties and standardized roles that are prescribed for them in industrial society. The transformations of place, and the intrusion of distance into local activities, combined with the centrality of mediated experience, radically change one's experience of the world (Giddens, 1991). We saw in the theoretical discussion how these characteristics of late modernity have actually given rise to new communities like the Transition Town Movement³⁶. Transition Towns originated in the UK but are now part of a global network that connects members all over the world, including people in Ontario, Canada. Otherwise stated, the 're-organization of time and space' in late modernity has re-organized social relationships so they are 'disembedded' from their local context and 're-embedded' across broad spans of time and space (Beck, 1986/1992). Interestingly, this research revealed the transition community struggles with the global aspect of its community. Note one member's comments³⁷,

³⁶ I do not intend to generalize my results; however, I do take the transition community to be an 'instance' of the voluntary simplicity movement (Snow & Trom, 2002). Thus I use the terms 'transition member' and 'voluntary simplifier' interchangeably, referring to individuals who adopt the 'simple living lifestyle'.

³⁷ The transition member is responding to the question: 'Can you tie SLOWest into the larger scheme of things, for instance, Transition Ottawa and such?' Only an excerpt of the response is included.

In the transition model, that started in Britain, it started in very small towns, the original town was seven or eight thousand people. What's not really clear, because it's very much a grassroots, from the bottom up, human-scale, local-change model, is how big a city can be and apply that model. The large cities that are trying it so far have a number of smaller neighborhood-based—if you want to call them cells or legs or feet, or whatever they are. Then something like Transition Ottawa can connect them to each other, can learn from each other, can address some issues city wide that come up (Pod1)

Secondly, I argue that because modern organizations are able to connect the local and global in ways that were unthinkable in traditional societies, as a result, they routinely affect people's lives. The separation of time and space has lifted social relations out of their local context; thus, requiring individuals to trust experts when making decisions about daily life. As Giddens (1991) writes, 'everyone living in conditions of modernity is 'affected by a multitude of abstract systems', and can at best 'process only superficial knowledge of their technicalities' (p.22). Our living habits depend upon knowledge systems that are removed from our local context. The resulting experience of trust and security and risk and danger, were what informed many of the discussions at transition meetings. As an example, one meeting I attended was a learning series about sustainable food practices. Many charts and graphs were put up on an overhead to illustrate the 'true cost' of processed food, as opposed to simply its 'monetary cost' (M4). An argument was made based on the existence of 'other costs' for processed and artificial food sources, such as those costs to the environment, wildlife and one's long-term health. The organizers argued, 'we wouldn't buy a car based solely on its monetary cost—we consider its make, year, warranty, etc. So why do we purchase food based strictly on its cost to the wallet?' (M4). At this meeting, I observed individuals, who likely had limited technical knowledge about food production systems, expressing 'mistrust' in corporate food 'experts'.

As Giddens also observed, ‘the chronic entry of knowledge into circumstances of action’ creates a sense of ambivalence about certain ‘post-traditional claims to knowledge’ (p.28). It was evident from attending group meetings that transition members live with a ‘calculative attitude’ to the open possibilities of action with which they are confronted continuously in their daily life (Giddens, 1991, p.28). Globalizing tendencies are inherent in the dynamic influences of modernization—time-space distancing, disembedding mechanisms and the reflexivity of modernity. My observations and textual analysis provide support for situating ‘voluntary simplifiers’ in a period of reflexive modernity. The evidence manifests itself within accounts of simple living narrated by transition members. In fact, the most prominent feature of the transition discourse is its articulation of the late modern experience as constituted through a dialectic between the local and the global.

The broad objectives of this project have been to understand how voluntary simplifiers interpret consumerism and derive meaning from their anti-consumerist practices. The study shows that lifestyle choices are reflexively linked to systems of globalization (Giddens, 1991; Bennett, 1998; Scammell, 2003; Micheletti et al., 2004; Beck, 1986/1992). Lifestyle choices concern political issues, which flow from ‘processes of self-actualization’ in post-traditional contexts, where ‘globalizing influences intrude deeply into the reflexive project-of-the-self’ (Giddens, 1991, p.214). In a similar fashion, Bennett (2004) argues that ‘effective activist political communication increasingly adopts a lifestyle vocabulary in consumer choice, self-image, and personal displays of social responsibility (p.102). In other words, it is through ‘political consumerism’ that lifestyles are expressed and addressed politically (Bennett, 2003, p.141). Advocates of political

consumerism suggest that lifestyle activists use ‘consumer brands and lifestyle icons as delivery vehicles for political messages’ (Bennett, 2003, p.147). In this view, political consumerism is,

‘An integral way in which people relate to themselves and the world through their relation to their own needs, through a relationship of reflexivity and choice ... It often becomes an experience of finding self-expression, a recognition of purpose and identity (Scammell, 2003, p.123).

In the instance of voluntary simplicity, this is not the case. In fact, political consumerism is only a small component of the VS lifestyle. This study supports the view that a new ‘politics of lifestyle’ is emerging; however, it suggests that fashioning an anti-consumerist identity is as much anchored in the language one uses as the products one consumes.

Simplicity-speak, as I have termed the discourse of voluntary simplicity, is the ‘cultural vehicle’ through which to express one’s self as simplifier (Cain, 1991). Simplicity-speak is a particular way of talking about the VS lifestyle, and this ‘uniform telling’ provides members with a sense of belonging to a group that shares the same experience. (Mishler, 1995; Cain, 1991; Ayometzi, 2007). Adopting simplicity-speak is important for assembling and organizing the VS identity—it is central to projecting³⁸ one’s self as a simplifier. Specifically, the voluntary simplicity movement promotes a ‘language ideology’ of therapy (Illouz, 2008). According to Illouz (2008), a ‘language

³⁸ Conceptualizing the VS identity as projected through language has roots in Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor. Goffman (1959) extended symbolic interaction theory toward the performative, thus transforming understandings of identity. He argued that we are forever ‘composing impressions of ourselves’, ‘projecting a definition of who we are’, and making claims about ourselves and the world that we test out and negotiate with others (as cited in Reissman, 2008, p.106). However, here, to emphasize the performative is not to suggest that identities are inauthentic, but only that identities are negotiated in situated interaction. In other words, ‘form and meaning emerge between people in social and historical particularity, in a dialogic environment’ (Reissman, 2008, p.107).

ideology' is a set of "self evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning 'roles of language in the social experiences of members' as they contribute to the expression of the group" (p.244, emphasis in original). In this sense, by drawing on a language ideology of therapy, the VSM adheres to a number of beliefs:

That self knowledge is gained by introspection; that introspection can in turn help us understand, control and come to terms with our social and emotional environment; and that verbal disclosure is key to social relations (p.244).

A therapeutic outlook characterizes the way simplifiers talk about their experiences of simple living. In the setting I have observed, the VS narrative and its moral orientation are taken on as a 'given' of the discourse and this contributes to make the group a meaningful entity, defined by its particular kind of discourse presuppositions (Fasulo, 2007, p.336).

I argue that voluntary simplicity 'is' a form of daily political practice, but not as it is conceptualized by the advocates of 'political consumerism' (Bennett, 1998; Micheletti et. al., 2004; Scammell, 2003). Instead, I offer my own three-pronged interpretation. First, the transition group identity is made and maintained through specific storytelling practices. Second, transition members are co-constructing new meanings and relationships to consumption. In other words, they are 'creating' culture. Third, I suggest they do this through a therapeutic language emphasizing the role of emotion in political action. Thus, I argue the transition network, as an example of voluntary simplicity, can be seen as a self-help movement.

Often the concept of self-help is understood to be a sort of 'turn to the self', a tendency to live only in the present day, and 'a retreat into narcissism fuelled by therapy' (as cited in Hazleden, 2003, p.413). Scholars have long argued the sort of 'American

individualism' advocated in self-help engenders a 'narcissistic self-centeredness' that in turns erodes social and political life (Woodstock, 2007, p.167). I argue instead that simplicity-speak and its 'therapeutic roots' play an integral part of the transition community's shared culture, as well as being instrumental in negotiating and (re) generating it (Goodwin, 1990; Georgakopoulou, 2006). The therapeutic discourse offers an entirely 'new cultural matrix' comprising metaphors, binary oppositions, narrative schemas, and explanatory frameworks, upon which simple lives are drawing, to mobilize support, defend their worldview and orient themselves in the face of ambiguous choices (Illouz, 2008, p.8).

Conclusion

It was shown thematically, structurally and linguistically that transition members organize around shared feelings of angst about how to live sustainably. In risk society, as Beck (1994) suggest, 'living and acting in uncertainty becomes a basic kind of experience' (p.12). Building on this idea, Beck (1986/1992) argues further that we are in a 'social epoch in which solidarity from anxiety arises and becomes a political force' (p.49).

[Risk society] contains within [itself] grassroots 'developmental dynamics that destroys boundaries', through which the people are forced together in the uniform position of civilization's self endangering (p.47, emphasis in original).

However, alongside Beck's (1986/1992) assertions about the presence of new political forms in risk society, is also a sense of doubt. He expresses uncertainty about the political capacity of emergent 'communities of danger' in risk society (p.47). That 'so far', anxiety has not been a foundation for rational action (p.50). He asks skeptically,

To what extent can anxiety communities withstand stress? What motives and forces for action do they set in motion? In what forms of action will they organize? Will anxiety drive people to irrationalism, extremism, or fanaticism? (p. 49)

By way of analyzing the role of emotion and discourse in shaping identity and culture, this study offers insight to Beck's discussion of political 'communities bound by anxiety'.

To begin, social movement scholarship often 'overlooks' the range, diversity and contested nature of specific feelings and emotions in various forms of activism (Brown & Pickerill, 2009b, p.26). According to Brown and Pickerill (2009), we need to know more about the specific kinds of feelings generated by particular activities and spaces, and how such an awareness of these emotions can help generate more sustainable forms of

activism. 'Protest is embodied' and the self is an important site of meaning for activism (p.31). For instance, feelings of 'despair' or 'personal fragility' are common in activism and can stem from a 'dissonance between activist life and mainstream society' (p.31). The self is the space where we attempt to 'align our politics with our emotions', where we make sense of why we feel certain ways (p.31). Notably, Brown & Pickerill (2009b) suggest the 'individualizing nature' of these emotions (such as anxiety) could be said to be part of a 'broader shift in an increasingly globalized world through which new forms of individualism have emerged' (p.32). In this sense, emotions may not only inspire and sustain activism, but they may shape individual's 'preferred organizational forms' and 'movement tactics' (p.26). In the case of voluntary simplicity, this individualism extends to strong notions of 'do-it-yourself' projects, while at the same time, maintaining an 'ethos of concern for others' (p.32). To use Brown & Pickerill's (2009b) term, 'emotional reflexivity'³⁹, is not necessarily an individual process, it can be a collective act, an ability to move beyond individual reflection to understanding our interpersonal relationships. In other words, 'mutual solidarity built from embodied experiences makes alliances between differently situated actors more possible' (Sundberg, 2007, p.162). It is in this context that the voluntary simplicity movement 'strategically' deploys emotion to engender commitment amongst its members.

Building on this, the project reveals an alliance between the therapeutic discourse and the voluntary simplicity ethos, which has produced a narrative of self that is conceived, told, and negotiated in interpersonal interaction. Observation affirms the self

³⁹ Brown & Pickerill (2009b) define 'emotional reflexivity' as practices 'through which activists (individually or collectively) reflect on their emotional needs and commitments, and find means of negotiating these alongside on-going resistance and involvement in social movements' (p.25)

is a 'performative demand': 'a narrative of authenticity' that is immediately linked to the moral dilemmas of living in the present (Abbinnett, 2003, p.31). Interestingly, however, it is not the reflexive project-of-the-self as such which is subversive; rather, it is the ethos of self-growth that signals major social and political transitions in late modernity (Giddens, 1991). Contra the dominant view, where the therapeutic ethos promotes a withdrawal into privacy and weakens social commitments (Lasch, 1979; Bellah et al., 1985; Putnam, 2000), the study suggests that the therapeutic lexicon does not depoliticize social and collective action. Instead, self-help culture has come to define 'languages of selfhood' and a way for actors to 'devise strategies of action' that help them implement certain definitions of the good life (Illouz, 2008, p.20)

Simplicity-speak is a form of therapeutic narrative that is performed at transition group meetings. It is a key category to understand how selfhood is constituted through simplicity culture, how the self communicates with others, and how one makes sense of one's place in a particular social environment. It is a basic 'schema' for organizing stories about the self (Illouz, 2008, p.178). Importantly, it is the form as much as the content of the narrative that help simplifiers make sense of themselves in the world (De Fina, 2009; Reissman, 2008). According to Illouz (2008), therapeutic narratives are cultural schemas that can be extended or transposed to new settings and can be actualized in a broad range of situations. In this view, simplicity-speak is a 'cultural performance' by which simplifiers, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation—it is the meaning that they, as social actors engaged in anti-consumerist practice, consciously or unconsciously wish to have others believe (p.179).

Transition meetings are characterized by making private stories about one's experience of political consumerism into public communicative acts. Simplicity-speak 'codes' how these private stories can be shared, the motivation in telling them in public, and how the audience should interpret them (p.187). In this way, simplicity-speak constitutes emotions such as anxiety and fear as 'public objects' to be exposed, discussed, argued over, and most of all 'performed', that is communicated for an audience and evaluated for their authenticity (p.180). Thus narratives of simple living become more than just a story—'it reorganizes experience as it tells it' (p.184). It organizes one's perception of the world within basic structures that in turn constrain the ways simplifiers communicate and interact with their environment.

Fundamentally, this study challenges the distinction between 'activist' and 'non-activist' via its questioning of boundaries between anti-consumerist activism and everyday life, by taking into account the 'real, messy, faltering ways in which activism happens', and the 'ambivalent and emotional vicissitudes' of activists' lives in practice (Horton & Kraftl, 2009, p.17). Social scientists have overwhelmingly tended to prioritize particular 'kinds' of activist behavior, and thus they typically '(re)produce a particular version of activism' (Horton & Kraftl, 2009, p.16). There is a tendency to highlight 'spectacular and staged actions' over more banal, day-to-day practices of collectively challenging social relations in one's everyday life (Chatterton, 2006, p.270). It is also typically the case to understand activism and/or being an activist, as an 'unconditional state: an identity, mindset, standpoint or self-aware commitment' (Horton & Kraftl, 2009, p.17). According to Horton & Kraftl (2009), this has essentialized and simplified the activist identity. In fact, activist identities, and particularly anti-consumerist identities, are

fluid, complex and multi-layered. In responding to Beck's query, the point of cultural and political analysis is not to measure individual or collective practices against what they 'ought to be' but rather to understand "how they have come to be what they are and why, in being what they are, 'they accomplish things'" (Illouz, 2008, p.4, emphasis in original). In examining the role of emotion and discourse in shaping identity and culture this project has broadened the debate about what constitutes anti-consumerist activism and what it can do.

Taking these ideas into account the study contributes to our knowledge of new social movements, identity, voluntary simplicity and anti-consumerist activism, and to the study of communication more broadly. First, emotions are relevant to the study of social movements for two reasons: one, movement goals often include the desire to change cultural standards regarding the acceptability and display of certain emotions and two, movement dynamics are fundamentally tied to emotions (Jasper, 1997). Second, identity has been shown to be embedded in language and discourse; thus, as an emergent, interactional phenomenon, the self can be observed as something that is 'done' rather than 'held' (Fasulo, 2007). Third, taken as a whole, the study contributes to the understanding of voluntary simplicity as an indirect form of anti-consumerist activism—i.e. a form of lifestyle activism. Simplifiers are constructing, internalizing and realizing new meanings of consumption by using stories as 'vehicles for ideological truth' (Askehave, 2004). Simplifiers inflect, nuance, rework and strategically adapt narratives to 'perform acts of group identity', to 'reaffirm group related goals, expertise and shared interests' (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p.384). Finally, in its contribution to the field of communication, this study emphasizes the interpersonal dimension of

communication as highly significant in relation to both identity and context as emergent in discourse (Davies, 2007). Storytelling, as a form of discourse, has been shown to be a 'mode of action' that comprises routine and repeated ways of acting and expressing particular orders of knowledge and experience (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p.383).

One way of interpreting the development and spread of therapeutic language is in a purely negative fashion, as a response to the debilitating effects of modern institutions on self-experience and emotions (Giddens, 1991). Another interpretation is that it represents a possibility to understand how 'new political forms emerge' and how 'new languages transform self-understandings that infuse social relations and actions' (Illouz, 2008, p.5). The aim has been to illustrate how the voluntary simplicity movement is emerging as a new political form, particularly by way of its rhetorical use of therapeutic language.

References

- Abbinnett, R. (2003). *Culture & identity: Critical theories*. London: Sage Publications.
- Abbott, J. & Ackbar, M. (dirs). (2003). *The corporation*. Big Picture Media.
- Adbusters. (2011a). *Buy nothing day*. Retrieved July 2011, from <http://www.adbusters.org/campaigns/bnd>
- Adbusters. (2011b). *Home*. Retrieved January 2011, from <http://www.adbusters.org/>
- Adler, P. & Adler, P. (1987). *Membership roles in field research*. California: Sage Publications.
- Agar, M. (1996). *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography*. California: Academic Press.
- Andrews, C. (1997). *The circle of simplicity: Return to the good life*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Angrosino, M. (2005). Recontextualizing observation: Ethnography, pedagogy, and the prospects for a progressive political agenda. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 729-745). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Arber, A. (2006). Reflexivity: A challenge for the researcher as practitioner? *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 11 (2), 147-157.
- Aronczyk, M., & Powers, D. (Eds.). (2010). *Blowing up the brand: Critical perspectives on promotional culture*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.
- Askehave, I. (2004). If language is a game - these are the rules: A search into the rhetoric of the spiritual self-help book 'If life is a game – these are the rules'. *Discourse & Society*, 15 (1), 5-31.

- Atkinson, W. (2007). Anthony Giddens as adversary of class analysis. *Sociology*, 41, 533-549.
- Ayometzi, C. (2007). Storying as becoming: Identity through the telling of conversation. In M. Bamberg, A. De Fina & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *Selves and identities in narrative and discourse* (pp. 41-70). Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. (M. Ritter, Trans.) London: Sage Publications. (Original work published 1986)
- Beck, U. (1994). The reinvention of politics: Towards a theory of reflexive modernization. In U. Beck, A. Giddens, & S. Lash (Eds.), *Reflexive modernization: Politics, tradition, and aesthetics in the modern social order* (pp.1-55). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Beck, U. (1997). *Reinvention of politics: Rethinking modernity in the global social order*. (M. Ritter, trans) Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. (Original work published 1993)
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualization*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bell, D. (1973). *The coming of post-industrial society: A venture in social forecasting*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bellah, R., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W., Swidler, A. & Tipton, M. (1985). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Bennett, L. (1998). The uncivic culture: Communication, identity, and the rise of lifestyle politics. *Political Science and Politics*, 31 (4), 741-761.

- Bennett, L. (2003). Lifestyle politics and citizen-consumers: Identity, communication and political action in late modern society. In J. Corner & D. Pels (Eds.), *Media and restyling of politics* (pp.137-150). London: Sage Publications.
- Bennett, L. (2004). Branded political communication: Lifestyle politics, logo campaigns, and the rise of global citizenship. In M. Micheletti, A. Follesdal & D. Stolle (Eds.), *The politics behind products* (pp. 101-126). New Jersey: Transaction Books.
- Binkley, S. (2008). Liquid consumption: Anti-consumerism and the fetishized de-fetishization of commodities. *Cultural Studies*, 22, 599-623.
- Binkley, S. & Littler, (2008). Cultural studies and anti-consumerism: A critical encounter. *Cultural Studies*, 22 (5), 519-530.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. (R.Nice, trans.) London: Routledge.
- Brangwyn, B. & Hopkins, R. (2008). *Transition initiatives primer: Becoming a transition town, city or even island*. Retrieved from [http://www.transitionnetwork.org/sites/default/files/TransitionInitiativesPrimer\(3\).pdf](http://www.transitionnetwork.org/sites/default/files/TransitionInitiativesPrimer(3).pdf)
- Brockmeier, J. (2000). Autobiographical time. *Narrative Inquiry*, 10 (1), 51-73.
- Brown, G. & Pickerill, J. (2009a). Editorial: Activism and emotional sustainability. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2, 1-3.
- Brown, G. & Pickerill, J. (2009b). Space for emotion in the spaces of activism. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2, 24-35.

- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Buckingham, D. (2008). Introducing identity. In D. Buckingham (Ed). *Youth, identity, and digital media* (pp.1-22). The John and Catherine MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Buechler, S. (2000). *Social movements in advanced capitalism: The political economy and cultural construction of social activism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burke, K. (1950). *A rhetoric of motives*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble*. London: Routledge.
- Cain, C. (1991). Personal stories: Identity acquisition and self-understanding in Alcoholics Anonymous. *Ethos*, 19 (2), 210-253.
- Calvey, D. (2008). The art and politics of covert research. *Sociology*, 42 (5), 905-918.
- Chaney, D. (1996). *Lifestyles*. New York: Routledge.
- Charmaz, K. (2004). Keynote address, fifth international, interdisciplinary advances in qualitative methods conference: Premises, principles, and practices in qualitative research: revisiting the foundations. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14 (7), 976-993.
- Chase, S. (2010). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 208-236). New York: Routledge.
- Chatterton, P. (2006). 'Give up activism' and change the world in unknown ways: Or, learning to walk with others on uncommon ground. *Antipode*, 38 (2), 259-281.
- Chatterton, P. (2010). So what does it mean to be anti-capitalist? Conversations with activists from urban social centres. *Urban Studies*, 47 (6), 1205-1224.

- Cherrier, H. (2003). *Managing identities: Toward an understanding of consumption lifestyling*. (Doct. Diss.) University of Arkansas. Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. ProQuest. UNB. 10 Oct.2008<<http://www.proquest.com.proxy.hil.unb.ca/>>
- Cherrier, H. & Murray, J. (2002). Drifting away from excessive consumption: A new social movement based on identity construction. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 29, 245-247.
- Clandinin, D. & Connelly, F. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Cohen, A. (1994). *Self-consciousness: An alternative anthropology of identity*. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, J. (1985). Strategy or identity: New theoretical paradigms and contemporary social movements. *Social Research*, 52 (4), 663-716.
- Cohen, S. & Taylor, L. (1993). *Escape attempts: The theory and practice of resistance to everyday life* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Craig, G. (2007). Power to the people? Lifestyle politics and public communication in New Zealand electricity grid protests. *Cultural Politics*, 3, 231-248.
- Craig-Lees, M.C. (2002). Understanding voluntary simplifiers. *Psychology & Marketing* 19, 187-210.
- Darra, S. (2008). Emotion work and the ethics of novice insider research. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 13 (3), 251-261.
- Davies, C. (2007). Language and identity in discourse in the American south: Sociolinguistic repertoire as expressive resource in the presentation of self. In M.

- Bamberg, A. De Fina & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *Selves and identities in narrative and discourse* (pp. 71-88). Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Day, R. (2005). *Gramsci is dead: Anarchist currents in the newest social movements*. New York: Pluto Press.
- Daymon, C. & Holloway, I. (2011). *Qualitative research methods in public relations and marketing communications*. New York: Routledge.
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practices of everyday life*. California: University of California Press.
- De Fina, A. (2009). Narratives in interview – the case of accounts: For an interactional approach to narrative genres. *Narrative Inquiry*, 19 (2), 233-258.
- De Fina, A. & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Analysing narratives as practices. *Qualitative Research*, 8 (3), 379-387.
- Debord, G. (1983). *Society of the spectacle*. Detroit: Black & Red. (Original work published 1967)
- Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2005). Part IV: Methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp.641-650). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Dunn, R. (2008). *Identifying consumption: Subjects and objects in consumer culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Elgin, D. (1981). *Voluntary simplicity: Toward a way of life that is outwardly simple, inwardly rich*. New York: Morrow.
- Elgin, D. (2007). *Garden of simplicity is growing in the world*. Retrieved from <http://www.duaneelgin.com/articles/garden-of-simplicity/>

- Elgin, D. (2011). *New Communities*. Retrieved from
<http://www.duaneelgin.com/links/new-communities/>
- Elgin, D. & Mitchell, A. (1977). Voluntary simplicity. *The Co-Evolution Quarterly*, (Summer). Retrieved from http://www.duaneelgin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/voluntary_simplicity.pdf
- Eliasoph, N. (1998). *Avoiding politics: How Americans produce apathy in everyday life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Etzioni, A. (1998). Voluntary simplicity: Characterization, select psychological implications and societal consequences. *Journal of Economic Psychology* 19, 619-643.
- Etzioni, A. (2003). Voluntary simplicity: Psychological implications, societal consequences. In D. Doherty & A. Etzioni (Eds.), *Voluntary simplicity: Responding to consumer culture* (pp.1-27). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Etzioni, A. (2004). The post affluent society. *Review of Social Economy* 62, 407-20.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.
- Farquharson, V. (2009). *Sleeping naked is green*. Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada.
- Fasulo, A. (2007). Theories of self in psychotherapeutic narratives. In M. Bamberg, A. De Fina & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *Selves and identities in narrative and discourse* (pp. 325-350). Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Fiske, J. (1989). *Understanding popular culture*. London: Unwin Hyman.

- Freeman, M. (2006). Life 'on holiday'? In defense of big stories. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16 (1), 131-138.
- Friedman, M. (1995). On promoting a sustainable future through consumer activism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 51 (4), 197-215.
- Frost, N. (2009). Do you know what I mean?: The use of a pluralistic narrative analysis approach in the interpretation of an interview. *Qualitative Research*, 9 (1), 9-29.
- Gautney, H. (2010). *Protest and organization in the alternative globalization era: NGOs, social movements, and political parties*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2006). Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16 (1), 122-130.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1994). Living in a post-traditional society. In U. Beck, A. Giddens, & S. Lash (Eds.), *Reflexive modernization: Politics, tradition, and aesthetics in the modern social order* (pp. 56-109). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gilbert, N. (Ed.). (2008). *Researching social life* (3rd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1989). On fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 18, 123-132.
- Gold, R. (1958). Roles in sociological field observations. *Social Forces*, 36, 217-223.

- Goodwin, M. (1990). *He-said-she-said: Talk as social organization among black children*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Goodwin, J. & Jasper, J. (2007). Emotions and social movements. In J. Sets & J. Turner (Eds.), *Handbook of the sociology of emotions* (pp.611-635). New York: Springer.
- Grigsby, M. (2000). *Buying time and getting by: The voluntary simplicity movement*. (Doct. Diss.) University of Missouri-Columbia. Michigan (ATT 9974635).
- Grigsby, M. (2004). *Buying time and getting by: The voluntary simplicity movement*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Gubrium, J. & Holstein, J. (1997). *The new language of qualitative method*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gubrium, J. & Holstein, J. (2009). *Analyzing narrative reality*. London: Sage Publications.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The theory of communicative action: Lifeworld and system* (T. McCarthy, trans.) Boston: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (2008). New social movements. In V. Ruggiero & N. Montagna (Eds.), *Social movements: A reader* (pp.201-205). New York: Routledge. (Reprinted from 1981, Telos, 49, 33-37)
- Harold, C. (2004). Pranking rhetoric: Culture jamming as media activism. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21 (3): 189-211.
- Harre, R., Brockmeier, J. & Muhlhausler, P. (1999). *Greenspeak: A study of environmental discourse*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hazleden, R. (2003). Love yourself: The relationship of the self with itself in popular self-help texts. *Journal of Sociology*, 39 (4), 413-428.

- Hogg, M., & Abrams D. (1988). *Social identifications*. London: Routledge
- Hopkins, R. & Lipman, P. (2009). *Who we are and what we do*. Retrieved from <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/sites/default/files/WhoWeAreAndWhatWeDo-lowres.pdf>
- Horton, D. (2003). Green distinctions: The performance of identity among environmental activists. *The Editorial Board of the Sociological Review*, 63-77.
- Horton, J. & Kraftl, P. (2009). Small acts, kind words and ‘not too much fuss’: Implicit activism. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2, 14-23.
- Housel, T. (2006). Solar panels, shovels and the net: Selective uses of technology in the homesteading movement. *Information, Communication & Society*, 9 (2), 182-201.
- Huneke, M. (2005). The face of the un-consumer: An empirical examination of the practice of voluntary simplicity in the United States. *Psychology and Marketing* 22, 527-550.
- Illouz, E. (2008). *Saving the modern soul: Therapy, emotions, and the culture of self-help*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Inglehart, R. (1990). *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jary, D., & Jary, J. (1995). The transformation of Anthony Giddens: The continuing story of structuration theory. (Review of the books: Anthony Giddens by I. Craib, *Modernity and self-identity*, by A. Giddens, *The transformation of intimacy*, by A. Giddens, *New rules of sociological method*, by A. Giddens). *Theory, Culture & Society*, 12, 141- 160.

- Jasper, J. (1997). *The art of moral protest: Culture, biography, and creativity in social movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jasper, J. (1998). The emotions of protest: Affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements. *Sociological Forum*, 13 (3), 397-424.
- Jasper, J. (2007). Cultural approaches in the sociology of social movements. In B. Klandermans & C. Roggeband (Eds.), *Handbook of social movements across disciplines* (pp.59-109). New York: Springer.
- Johnson, B. (2004). Simply identity work? The voluntary simplicity movement. *Qualitative Sociology*, 27 (4), 527-530.
- Juris, J. (2008). Performing politics: Image, embodiment, and affective solidarity during anti-corporate globalization protests. *Ethnography*, 9 (1), 61-97.
- Kim, H. (2002). Shame, anger, and love in collective action: Emotional consequences of suicide protest in South Korea, 1991. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 7 (2), 159-176.
- Klandermans, B. & Roggeband, C. (Eds.). (2007). *Handbook of social movements across disciplines*. New York: Springer.
- Klein, N. (2000) *No logo: Taking aim at the brand bullies*. Toronto: Vintage Canada Edition.
- Labov, W. (1972). The transformation of experience in narrative syntax. In W. Labov (Ed.), *Language in the inner city: Studies in the Black English vernacular* (pp. 354-396). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. (W. Moore & P. Cammack, trans.) London: The Thetford Press Ltd.
- Lasch, C. (1979). *The culture of narcissism: American life in an age of diminishing expectations*. New York: Warner Books.
- Lasn, K. (2000). *Culture jam: Uncooling of America*. New York: Quill.
- Le Bon, G. (1960). *The crowd*. New York: Viking. (Original work published 1895)
- Lears, J. (1981). *No place of grace: Antimodernism and the transformation of American Culture 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon.
- Lichterman, P. (1992). Self-help reading as a thin culture. *Media, Culture and Society*, 14, 421-447.
- Lichterman, P. (1996). *The search for political community: American activists reinventing commitment*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lichterman, P. (1998). What do movements mean? The value of participant-observation. *Qualitative Sociology*, 21 (4), 401-418.
- Lichterman, P. (2002). Seeing structure happen: Theory-driven participant observation. In B. Klandermans & S. Staggenborg (Eds.) *Methods of social movement research* (pp. 118-145). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lindlof, T. & Taylor, B. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods* (2nd ed.). California: Thousand Oaks.
- Littler, J. (2005). Beyond the boycott: Anti-consumerism, cultural change and the limits of reflexivity. *Cultural Studies*, 19 (2), 227-252.

- Littler, J. (2009). *Radical consumption: Shopping for change in contemporary culture*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Lofland, J. & Lofland, L. (1984). *Analysing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Luttrell, W. (2010a). Interactive and reflexive models of qualitative research design. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 159-163). New York: Routledge.
- Luttrell, W. (2010b). Introduction: The promise of qualitative research in education. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 1-17). New York: Routledge.
- Macy, J., Seed, J., Fleming, P. & Naess, A. (1988). *Thinking like a mountain: Towards a council of all beings*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.
- Marsen, S. (2006). How to mean without saying: Presupposition and implication revisited. *Semiotica*, 160, 243-263.
- Mauthner, N. & Doucet, A. (1998). Reflections on a voice centered relational method of data analysis: Analysing maternal and domestic voices. In J. Ribbens & R. Edwards (Eds.), *Feminist dilemmas in qualitative research: Private lives and public texts* (pp.413-31). London: Sage.
- Maxwell, J. (2010). Validity: How might you be wrong? In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 279-287). New York: Routledge.
- McGee, M. (2005). *Self-help, Inc.: Makeover culture in American life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- McGuigan, J. (2006). Culture and risk. In G. Mythen & S. Walklate (Eds.), *Beyond the risk society* (pp.211-230). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- McKercher, C. & Mosco, V. (Eds.). (2007). *Knowledge workers in the information society*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Meisner, M. (1995). Metaphors of nature: Old vinegar in new bottles. *Trumpeter*, 12, 11-18.
- Melucci, A. (1980). The new social movements: A theoretical approach. *Social Science Information*, 19 (2), 199-226.
- Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the present: Social movements and individual needs in contemporary society*. London: Hutchinson.
- Melucci, A. (1995). The process of collective identity. In H. Johnston & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *Social movements and culture* (pp.41-63). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Micheletti, M. (2003). *Political virtue and shopping: Individuals, consumerism, and collective action*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Micheletti, M., & Stolle, D. (2008). Fashioning social justice through political consumerism, capitalism, and the internet. *Cultural Studies*, 22 (5), 749-769.
- Micheletti, M., Follesdal, A. & Stolle, D. (Eds.). (2004). *The politics behind products* (pp. 101-126). New Jersey: Transaction Books.

- Mishler, E. (1995). Models of narrative analysis: A typology. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 5 (2), 87-123.
- Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the political: Thinking in action*. New York: Routledge.
- Mouffe, C. (Ed.) (1992). *Dimensions of radical democracy: Pluralism, citizenship, community*. New York: Verso.
- Nava, M. (1990). Consumerism reconsidered: Buying and power. *Cultural Studies*, 5, 157-173.
- Nelson, M., Rademacher, M., & Paek, H. (2007). Downshifting consumer = upshifting citizen? An examination of a local freecycle community. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611, 141-156.
- Norrick, N. (2007). Conversational storytelling. In D. Herman (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to narrative* (pp.127-141). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Brien, M. (1999). Theorising modernity: Reflexivity, identity and environment in Giddens' social theory. In M. O'Brien, Penna, S. & C. Hay (Eds.), *Theorising modernity: Reflexivity, environment and identity in Giddens' social theory* (pp.17-38). Essex: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Peretti, J. & Micheletti, M. (2004). The Nike sweatshop email: Political consumerism, Internet, and culture jamming. In M. Micheletti, A. Follesdal, & D. Stolle (Eds.), *Politics, products and markets: Exploring political consumerism past and present* (pp.127-142). New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Phoenix, A. (2008). Analysing narrative contexts. In M. Andrews, C. Squire & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (pp.64-75). New York: Sage Publications.

- Pitts, J. & Miller-Day, M. (2007). Upward turning points and positive rapport-development across time in researcher-participant relationships. *Qualitative Research*, 7 (2), 177-201.
- Poletta, F. (2002). *Freedom is an endless meeting: Democracy in American social movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative* (pp. 5-23). London: Falmer.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rampton, B. (2006). *Language in late modernity: Interaction in an urban school*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rasmussen, M. (2006). Counter-revolution, the spectacle, and the Situationist avant-garde. *Social Justice*, 33, 5-15.
- Reiff, P. (1966). *The triumph of the therapeutic: Uses after Freud*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Reverend Billy. (2010). About Us Section. In *The church of life after shopping*. Retrieved Dec 2010, from <http://www.revbilly.com/about-us>
- Riessman, C. (1993). *Narrative analysis: Vol.30. Qualitative research methods series*. London: Sage Publications.
- Riessman, C. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. California: Sage Publications.
- Ritzer, G. (2002). Revolutionizing the world of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2 (1), 103-118.

- Ross, A. (2008). The quandaries of consumer-based labor activism: A low-wage case study. *Cultural Studies*, 22 (5), 770-787.
- Roszak, T. (1979). *Person-planet: The creative destruction of Industrial society*. London: Gollancz.
- Sandlin, J. & Walther, C. (2009). Complicated simplicity: Moral identity formation and social movement learning in the voluntary simplicity movement. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59 (4), 298-317.
- Scammell, M. (2000). The Internet and civic engagement: The age of the citizen consumer. *Political Communication*, 17, 351-355.
- Scammell, M. (2003). Citizen consumers: towards a new marketing of politics? In J. Corner & D. Pels (Eds.), *Media and restyling of politics* (pp.117-136). London: Sage Publications.
- Schor, J. (1998). *The overspent American: Upscaling, downshifting and the new consumer*. New York: Basic Books.
- Schor, J. (2000). Towards a new politics of consumption. In J. Holt & J. Schor (Eds.). *The consumer society reader* (pp.446-462). New York: The New Press.
- Schor, J. (2006). Tackling turbo consumption: An interview with Juliet Schor, by J. Littler. *Sounding*, 34, 45-55.
- Schor, J. (2010). *Plenitude: The new economics of true wealth*. New York: The Penguin Press.
- Schudson, M. (2007). Citizens, consumers and the good society. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 611 (1), 236-249.

- Schwartz, M. & Schwartz, C. (1955). Problems in participant-observation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 60, 343-354.
- Senensky, S. (2003). *Healing and empowering the feminine: A labyrinth journey*. Brooklyn: Lantern Books.
- Shah, D., McLeod, D., Kim, E., Lee, S., Gotlieb, M., Ho, S. & Breivik, H. (2007). Political consumerism: How communication and consumption orientations drive 'lifestyle politics'. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 611, 217-235.
- Shaw, D. & Newholm, T. (2002). Voluntary simplicity and the ethics of consumption. *Psychology & Marketing* 19, 167-185.
- Simmel, G. (1991). The problem of style. (M. Ritter, trans.) *Theory, Culture and Society*, 8 (3), 63–71.
- Smart, B. (2010). *Consumer society: Critical issues and environmental consequences*. London: Sage Publications.
- Smith, P. & Smythe E. (2000). *Globalization, citizenship and technology: The MAI meets the Internet*. Paper for the 41st Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Los Angeles, March 14-18.
- Snow, D. & Anderson, L. (1991). Researching the homeless: The characteristic features and virtues of the case study. In J. Feagin, & A. Orum (Eds.), *A case for the case study* (pp. 143- 173). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Snow, D. & Trom, D. (2002). The case study and study of social movements. In B. Klandermans & S. Staggenborg (Eds.) *Methods of social movement research* (pp. 146-172). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Spurlock, M. (dir). (2004). *Supersize me*. Kathbur Pictures/Showtime Network.
- Sundberg, J. (2007). Reconfiguring north-south solidarity: Critical reflections on experiences of transnational resistance. *Antipode*, 39 (1), 144-166.
- Taber, N. (2010). Institutional ethnography, autoethnography, and narrative: An argument for incorporating multiple methodologies. *Qualitative Research*, 10 (1), 5-25.
- Tafjel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, G. (2010). *The new political sociology: Power, ideology and identity in an age of complexity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tedlock, B. (1991). From participant observation to the observation of participation: The emergence of narrative ethnography. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 47 (1). 69-94.
- The BP oil spill, by the numbers. (2011, April 10) *CBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2010/10/19/f-bp-oil-spill-numbers.html>
- Tjora, A. (2006). Writing small discoveries: An exploration of fresh observers' observations. *Qualitative Research*, 6 (4), 429-451.
- Tope, D., Chamberlain, L., Crowley, M. & Hodson, R. (2005). The benefits of being there: Evidence from the literature on work. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 34 (4), 470-493.
- Touraine, A. (1981). *The voice and the eye: An analysis of social movements*. (A. Duff, trans.) Cambridge: University Press. (Original work published 1978)

- Transition Ottawa. (2011a). *About us*. Retrieved from
<http://transitionottawa.ning.com/page/about-us>
- Transition Ottawa. (2011b). *Start here*. Retrieved from
<http://transitionottawa.ning.com/page/start-here>
- Transition Network. (2011). *Official initiatives by number*. Retrieved from
<http://www.transitionnetwork.org/initiatives/by-number?page=12>
- Tucker, K. (2010). *Workers of the world, enjoy!* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Wallulis, J. (1998). *The new insecurity: The end of the standard job and family*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Witkowski, T. (2010). A brief history of frugality discourses in the United States. *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 13 (3), 235-258.
- Woodstock, L. (2007). Think about it: The misbegotten promise of positive thinking discourse. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 31 (2), 166-189.
- Yin, R. (1989). *Case study research: Design and methods* (Rev. ed.) California: Sage Publications.
- Zavestoski, S. (2002). The social-psychological bases of anti-consumption attitudes. *Psychology and Marketing* 19, 149-165.

Table 1.1. Narrative Elements - Field Texts

Narrative Elements		Definitions	Format in Field Texts
Abstract (AB)		Summarizes point of the narrative	Organizing Metaphor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defining a relationship between humans and the planet, self to others, often creating an organic whole And/or Creating a sense of crisis, urgency
Orientation (OR)		Provides time, place, situation, participants	Statement of Topic/Issue of concern
Complicating Action (CA)		Describes sequence of actions, turning point, crisis, problems	Confronted with source of information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Info highlights key issues taken up by the VSM Prompts/incites action and/or reflection on behalf of the narrator
Evaluation (EV)		Narrator's commentary on complicating action	Reflections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positions self in relation to an issue Takes a moral stance on the issue
Embedded Narrative	(AB)		Introduces a related personal experience/concern
	(OR)		Characterizes self as doubtful, fearful, unsure, anxious
	(CA)		A 'step' is taken, an action made
	(EV)		Discussion of 'positives' associated with having made the step
Resolution (RE)		Resolves plot	Often no resolution, sometimes 'suggested' practices offered
Coda		Ends Narrative, returns listener to present	Listing of 'opportunities to act', whether on one's own or within/with existing organizations

Table 1.2. Narrative Elements - Field Texts: Composite

Narrative Elements		Definitions	Examples from Field Texts
Abstract (AB)		Summarizes point of the narrative	<p>The earth has non-negotiable need for rest and rejuvenation just as we all do</p> <p>This 'place' [SLOWest] brings me a deep sense of belonging feeling of 'coming home'</p> <p>Can the great turning happen?</p> <p>we'll end up where we're heading, deep in doo-doo</p>
Orientation (OR)		Provides time, place, situation, participants	<p>[The] group has on its plate a discussion around</p> <p>four prominent economists debated whether a green economy was necessary or doable</p> <p>I was recently having a cup of tea with [who] was describing a dilemma</p> <p>[The speaker] asks this question at the 2009 Bioneers conference</p>
Complicating Action (CA)		Describes sequence of actions, turning point, crisis, problems	<p>the book was instrumental in helping me</p> <p>I participated in an 8 week Mindfulness-based course</p> <p>a recent study showed</p> <p>stumbled across Canadian website</p>
Evaluation (EV)		Narrator's commentary on complicating action	<p>in order to embody this way of being in the world a practice is imperative</p> <p>Opportunities for deep and open conversation are few and far between</p> <p>small acts of kindness make a huge difference</p> <p>science is speaking, not woo-wishing</p> <p>it's strange that we have to train people to help others</p>
Embedded Narrative	(AB)		<p>For me, without places where I can share deeply with my peers is a form of isolation</p> <p>The places where I see conflict and from which I want to run are everywhere</p> <p>What can I do for this [ancient oak tree to be cut down for a quick housing development]?</p> <p>My vision is for people to learn about</p>
	(OR)		<p>I have discovered I have big fears</p> <p>I feel uncomfortable holding this tension between intention and action</p> <p>sometimes these conversations are hard</p> <p>I can't do what she did</p> <p>I was in angst over not doing enough</p> <p>I do wonder at times and I can feel doubtful</p>

Embedded Narrative	(CA)	<p>experimenting with walking towards conflict</p> <p>I don't blame myself for any sense of limitation</p> <p>step outside of the mainstream paradigm consciously choose something more personally aligned</p> <p>she offered to take the lead</p> <p>I have signed up for the event</p> <p>I have come to trust this wisdom and have been involved in apprentice teaching/guiding</p>
	(EV)	<p>I have found it creates a sense of safety in me</p> <p>I am encouraged</p> <p>This program costs practically nothing and helps reinforce the social fabric of society</p> <p>it changes the personal landscape completely</p> <p>leads to a sense of freedom from the limitation sense my everyday self subtly feels</p> <p>can help us say who we are, and help each other in our efforts towards meaningful change</p>
Resolution (RE)	Resolves plot	<p>It's possible at any given time</p> <p>One essential practice, a building block to many others</p> <p>when the time feels right for us all</p> <p>is a communal response to conflict</p> <p>[giving] an opportunity to explore personal responsibility and then move to an action plan that will restore harmony</p> <p>'conscious evolution', rather than accommodating the tribe, is a very positive and exciting option</p>
Coda	Ends Narrative, returns listener to present	<p>One such opportunity is an upcoming workshop</p> <p>In this month I hope we can slow down enough to notice others</p> <p>I'd love to see a small group opportunity available to each Slowester</p> <p>If you'd like to become involved in this program</p> <p>If you are interested in this beginning endeavour</p>

APPENDIX A

A Snapshot of the Transition Movement in 2011⁴⁰

Local initiatives

There are now many hundreds of local Transition initiatives, with more forming all the time, many of the early ones now well advanced in producing Energy Descent Plans. Transition has begun to make a lot of difference to people's lives, especially those active in it.

Social: It provides a rich social life, with frequent social events big and small: shared meals, parties, and meetings. Typically after a shared meal there might be swapping and trading, or a lecture, film or discussion to govern the Initiative, often followed by music and dancing. People know each other better, and work closely together in many ways.

Food: People source a lot more of their food from local producers, often organic. They increasingly share produce grown in their gardens and allotments and some new community gardens. They have well-organized deliveries from local farms and farmers' markets. There is a growing number of newly established Community Supported Agriculture schemes, and peri-urban market gardens. A few are experimenting with pig and chicken clubs, and community bakeries are starting to mill local flour. Some people are cooking prepared meals for time-pressed neighbours. Many people are learning to cook and garden for the first time, with Transition groups offering training and reskilling in both.

Transport: Fuel for personal car use has become much more expensive than 3 years ago, so Transition groups' transport themed groups have organized ride share schemes, collection and delivery systems for children, shoppers and social events. Living without a car is now possible in a way that it wasn't 3 years previously. Car share schemes mean that people have access to borrowed or hired larger vehicles when they need them. There is a lot more cycling among the fit and healthy, and the high price of fuel has meant that many businesses now encourage people to work from home where possible.

Household Energy: Transition initiatives have, with funding from their local authorities, initiated 'insulation clubs', where people have learned the best ways of reducing household heating needs and help each other do it. Numerous tricks and tips to use less energy have become popular. A growing number of Transition initiatives have now set up Energy Services Companies (ESCOs), owned by the community, to provide locally generated electricity through community-owned wind, solar, hydro and biomass schemes.

Re-use, recycling, repair: Many local schemes have been started to extend the life of clothes, repair goods and appliances, creating some part-time employment. Workshops in

⁴⁰ Snapshot of the Transition Movement as projected in 2008 (Hopkins & Lipman, 2009, p.18-20).

making do and repairing are commonplace, often inviting older people to share their undervalued skills with younger generations. Much of the local food is distributed in reusable containers. Transition initiatives are facilitating the bulk-buying of goods designed for durability and which can be repaired when needed.

Local economy: People have begun to do a lot of organized trading and exchange with each other, sometimes for money, sometimes for local currency, but very often as favours. They give and receive goods that they no longer want, help each other with childcare, rides, deliveries, and many other services. Groups of young people offer 'technical support' on anything from computers to DVDs. This enables people's money to go much further, and provides some income for those without jobs. They have identified the like-minded local independent businesses and trades people whom they preferentially patronize, and give them ratings and recommendations on their websites.

Other aspects of community: People are learning that grassroots self-organization takes a certain amount of effort and are beginning to learn how to do it well. Some people volunteer to look after aspects of the whole of the local transition initiative. There are groups set up to handle conflicts between people, to provide emotional support and counseling when needed, but also to co-ordinate the initiative: to help keep the theme groups in touch with each other and working synergistically, to plan for the future, and to systematically consult on policy decisions.

APPENDIX B

Field Sites⁴¹Meeting 1: Transition Ottawa Pre-Holiday Get-Together (4 hrs)

You are invited to a Transition Ottawa "Pre-Holiday Get-Together" to look at exciting new project ideas for the coming year.

Full Evening Program: *There will be presentations and discussions on projects including:*

- * Pollinator Gardens*
- * Ottawa Tree Nut Co-op*
- * The Torbolton Culture Centre for Transition Projects (including agroecology farm training*
- * Salad Tables*
- * Permaculture Workshops*
- * The Sustainable Living Ottawa West (SLOWest) Bike-Sharing Project; and*
- * Sustainable Living Ottawa East (SLOE) will present an update of restoration work on the Rideau River Nature Trail, and on a new cycling committee that is doing some very creative thinking on improving infrastructure in Old Ottawa East.*
- *We will also feature the winning short films from the Transition Ottawa and Carleton University Film Competition developed by Carleton Information Technology students and Transition Ottawa members. These fun and informative films offer cool solutions for saving money while helping the environment and personal health. They focus on aspects of sustainable, transitioned lifestyles including energy conservation, local food, recycling, transportation and simple living.*

Bring along your ideas: *As well, bring your own ideas and project suggestions to share and discuss with everyone.*

Food sharing in action: *We also ask each of you to bring some holiday dessert treats (cookies, squares, cake, fruit, cheese, etc.) to share. We will provide hot apple cider, herbal teas, eggnog and fruit punch.*

Meeting 2: Facilitating the Shift: Inspiring Actions Towards Sustainability (2 hrs)

⁴¹ The following is a brief description of group meetings I attended, as they are described on the TTO website. Minor adjustments in formatting were made to accommodate moving the text from web to print. Any details that could identify members have been omitted.

**Why Transition? Introduction to transition towns: Slide show*
**Well-crafted short films to give us context*
**Breakout groups for discussion and engagement*
**Where do we go from here? Inspiring action: [Members] share their transition initiatives.*

Suggested Donation: \$5.00 / pwyc

Presented by Transition Ottawa/SLOCentre
Come join us for this film, speaker, discussion and action inspiration series.

Meeting 3: Heart & Soul Transition Group Meeting (2 hrs)

Transition Town initiatives recognize the importance of recognizing and including the inner dimensions of our experience on this shared journey towards a sustainable way of living in harmony with the rest of life. While we focus on tangible projects that we can undertake together in the community we want to pay attention to the source of our inspiration and energy as well as our hesitation and resistance to change.

Meeting 4: Sustainable Food: The SLOWest Learning Series (2 hrs)

The choices we make about food can have a significant impact on the planet. This session discusses some of the ways our food production system impacts the environment and how local eating and organic agriculture can mitigate these impacts.

Meeting 5: Facilitating the Shift: Sustainable Food (2 hrs)

Film/Speakers
Transition Ottawa locally made films
Breakout groups focusing on a variety of food themes
\$5 donation / pwyc

Meeting 6: Monthly Meeting: A Social Event (3 hrs)

Informal meetings like these help with building the connections, the trust that any Transition initiative requires. I think it's important to meet regularly (at least once a month) so we can keep the momentum going and motivate each other to keep participating in the Transition movement.