

Intending Community: Space, Place, Home
Unearthing sustainability at the margins

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to current research and discourse that engages with sustainability as a pervasive challenge that must, by its very nature, be situated in contexts that are both global and local. Setting the scene, the work initially reviews some of the more significant and overarching transformations that have led to escalating threats to ecosystems, species and climate. Here, the limits of both national and international environmental governance are exposed, particularly as they navigate the paradoxical nature of development, which increasingly threatens the integrity of the lifeworlds on which it relies. In establishing a more grounded register of the ways in which this plays out, primary research in Australia and Scotland traces the underlying values, intentions and actions that inform the ways in which local life is sustained.

Implied by the title is a broadly inclusive exposition of community, one that reasserts the value and relation of the locale to the broader lifeworlds that surround it. Framed by a co-constructivist methodology, a diverse range of scholarship incorporating physical and social sciences, philosophy and eco-theosophy challenges the limits of academic orthodoxy, producing a more coherent conceptualisation of both community and sustainability. In similar fashion, social-environmental histories more usually consigned to the past are revisited as continuities that infect the present with increasingly complex ecological challenges. In rounding the journey, an aesthetic engagement with the locale challenges an over-arching discourse that marginalises community life under the rubric of governance and development. Articulated through personal-political narratives and eco-theosophical fiction, the frailty and limits of human agency are set beside the contingent, fluid nature of spaces and places that constitute home. In the process, community life is recalibrated as an essential link in the broader chain of planetary life, one that presents as a potentially more durable locus of sustainability-in-practice.

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration

I, Jess McColl, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Intending Community - Space Place, Home: Unearthing Sustainability at the Margins* is no more than 100,000 words in length, including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work.

.....
Jess McColl

.....
Date

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Prelude

'Every synthesis begins anew and has to be taken up from the start, as if for the first time.' (Isabelle Stengers¹)

On a brisk Sunday morning in late autumn, 2010 I walk east along the Edwards Point trail – a four-kilometre sand spit that reaches southwards into Swan Bay. Tucked into the eastern end of the Bellarine Peninsula in Victoria, Edward's Point lies 115 km southwest of Melbourne and 40 km east of Geelong².

I carry my camera and a small sound-recorder in a daypack, along with a bottle of water and a couple of apples. I'm on my way from town to the Point. The round trip will take me about three hours. Tide's turned and on the way out and I'm scouting for voices, noise and images; land and seascapes; everything - trees, grasses, fungi, seaweed, the wind gusting through the tea-tree, the bush-rustle of lizards and birds.

My track is well trod by countless beasties, birds and folk who idle into the protected salt marsh. Today there's no-one about, just me and whatever lurks. This is habitat country, marine reserve. Pelicans, diving birds, migrating finches, parrots, cockies³, possums, snakes, bountiful fish – all of that and the tangle of gnarled old tea-tree with its under-story of introduced flora and native grasses. I meet up with the oldest tea-tree on the track. She bends and groans from her mid-trunk. Her torso has flexed through decades of gusting wind to stall in the shape of a large, well-tied knot. She's unmistakeable, always there. Today she looks a bit the worse for wear. The trunk is starting to give out under years of strain. The bark is slipping away and the ravaged wood is splintering at the point of bend. She'll lose her balance soon enough and down she'll come, right across the track... I tap her on the way through, a brief hello. I'll miss her when she goes. Ten years I've trod the track. Ten years she's been sentinel on the journey. I shake myself inwardly, so the no one who's not there won't see me.

¹ Isabelle Stengers, *Penser avec Whitehead: Une libre et sauvage creation de concepts* (Trans. 'To think with Whitehead: A book of wild creation and concepts') in Latour, B. (2005), 'What Is Given In Experience', *Boundary 2*, 32, 223-237.

² Coordinates: 38°13'S 144°41'E

³ Cockatoo

I move on, slowly at first. Maybe I should go back, sit a while. Have some time with the old girl. Then, out of nowhere, a no-one with a voice.

"She'll be right for a year or two yet."

I turn sharply and all but lose my balance. Out of the scrub emerges a voice, followed by the short-statured, robust being from which it issues.

"G'day...didn't give ya a fright, did I?"

I reassure the voice that I didn't get a fright (despite the fact that I did) and ready myself to move on. But the now embodied voice is on for a chat...

"Yeah, seen you walking that dog of yours a few times – up round Noury's Landing. Nice dog that. Not with ya today?"

Dogless for the morning I engage.

"No, not today. I don't take her down to the Point. Too many birds – it all gets a bit too tempting for her."

Extending his hand, Lionel introduces himself. We trade names and start moving on together, as if choreographed. Lionel is taking the same path, ambling in the same direction. I'd seen him around from time to time. Always friendly, the occasional nod from a distance. He resumes his dog-reference.

"Yeah, well, wish all the other dog-lovers thought like that...down at the Point, just where the marsh drains into Swan Bay, dead roo⁴. Big buggar, he was. Looks like dogs got him."

Lionel eyes off my backpack and shifts his weight from foot to foot, a bit sheepish as his slow request emerges.

"That pack, don't suppose you've got some water, have ya? Usually come prepared, got side-tracked today. Bit thirsty. Reckon you could spare some? Save me a hike back it would."

I drop the pack onto the track and open it to retrieve the water bottle. As I do Lionel's eagle-eye spots the apples, the camera and the voice-recorder. At the same time my nose discerns the rank smell of rotting fish hovering about Lionel's being. I am discrete, polite and act as if the stench isn't happening. Lionel continues.

⁴ Kangaroo

“Jeez, you came prepared, good on ya. Apple’d go down pretty well. Been here since five. Bit peckish.”

And so it was that the aromatic Lionel downed half of the contents of my water bottle followed by one and a half apples, all the while assuring me that there would be no backwash in the bottle from which he had drunk, and even less spit on the remaining half apple. Besides, he didn’t have anything contagious, as far as he knew, and anyway, now that he was fed and watered he could accompany me and have a bit of a yak. And so he did, as we walked along the track to Edwards Point, yakking our way through the journey.

If the circumstances of my meeting with Lionel were ordinary and unremarkable, then the exchange between us was anything but. In the course of our three-hour walk we eventually found ‘Ron’, an injured Pelican that Lionel had rescued and returned to the protected small spit at the very tip of Edward’s Point. Along the way we stumbled on one of nature’s conjuring tricks and by the time we parted I understood what it was to be owned by an environment.

I had gone out into what was a familiar and much loved place for the express purpose of skilling up with digital camera and voice recorder in order to support the project that lay ahead of me – a reflexive ethnography into community sustainability in Australia and Scotland. The digital artefacts that would form a significant part of what I was doing were always in the foreground, along with musings on the people I might meet. I understood the limits of my own artisanship and I knew that practice would be imperative, even if it would ne’er make perfect. Yet a chance meeting on an isolated track lifted everything I intended into sharp relief. Well met along the way, Lionel and I swapped stories – his about Ron and the injury he had sustained; the broader life-world that owned him, and which he, in turn, claimed as his own; his curiosity about why I had a camera and a voice recorder (‘that thingy’). As for me, I engaged easily enough, talking about the idea of community – was it everything, or was it just about human beings; was it sustainable or would it die a slow death; capturing image and sound and the voices of ordinary people as they talked about what sustainability meant to

them, about what they valued; about the things in their own environments that expressed sustainability or sustenance. He had engaged freely, easily and wanted to help, insisting with great gusto and good humour that I could 'practice' on him. He was OK with having his voice recorded and helped frame some of the stills that I took; I could quote him, but I couldn't use any of the voice grabs because... 'people only believe what they see in print'. Apart from that, he was camera shy, so I didn't push it. And what did he want in return? A really good shot of Ron – something he could 'put on the wall'.

It had been a longish walk and by the time we parted, some two hours later, our conversation had deepened. We'd talked about the pervasiveness of a degrading climate and the likely impacts on the flora and fauna before us. Closer to the ground we trod were the impacts of the deep-dredging of Port Phillip Bay - the body of water that merged with Swan Bay and washed the shores of Edward's Point.

Why had the Bay been dredged so deeply, against all scientifically grounded advice? In a word, super-containers - deep drafted ships that transport all manner of stuff into markets hungry for more. Cars, heavy machinery, you name it – the supply chain was now assured. As to the cost; for weeks dead birds had been swept up on every tide – pelicans, cormorants and mutton-birds among them; countless dead fish, a seal. Heavy metals had been liberated from the floor of the bay when the super-dredges destabilised tons of contaminated silt and sand. The order of things - the various species of sea grass, along with birds, fish and mammals wasn't just upset, it was turned against itself. The now much-deepened shipping channels caused the sweep of water into the Bay to increase in both volume and rate. The trees along the shoreline were falling away as erosion advanced. Not only had things gone toxic, they'd gone crazy.

At some point I asked Lionel if it ever made him angry or despairing - the mess, the dead things, the madness of human progress. He'd struck me as a quiet optimist, determined to claim his birth right and tend what was 'his', so I wasn't all that surprised by his laconic response.

There was no point to the anger. None.

“Things is what they is, *and, so am I*. Do what you can and keep doing it; just stay with it, no-matter-what.”

As the months passed we encountered each other here and there along that well trod track. He got his shot of Ron and we swapped books. I gave him a copy of Alex MacGillivray’s *Words that Changed the World – Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring*⁵. In return I inherited Tom Mead’s *Killers of Eden: The Killer Whales of Twofold Bay*⁶.

A year later I am in Scotland. It’s June 2011 when I wander into the St. Columba Hotel. Perched on a prominent hill overlooking the Sound of Iona the Columba hosts tourists, pilgrims and day-trippers. The grounds are well tended and roll toward the sea. The building fits the environment – welcoming, well maintained, timber clad and warm.

This is Iona – three miles from north to south, one and a half miles from east to west. One of the smaller of the Western Isles it lies off the southwest coast of Mull, third largest of the islands. I’ve been here for a couple of days, just long enough to walk the granite hills and get my bearings. A year after my encounter with Lionel I am a tad more confident in my skills with camera and sound recorder. I’ve already interviewed some community people in Australia and I’m about to start the process here. I’d noticed that the Columba had its own organic garden and atop its gable roof there was a series of solar panels. Amidst the medieval monuments and old crofters cottages the Columba, whilst aesthetically pleasing, sat strange in the landscape with its green-energy hat of photovoltaic cells. I was both engaged and intrigued, particularly because there were no other icons of renewable energy to be seen on the island. It seemed like a good place to start. I walked into the small foyer and asked if the manager was about and if he or she could spare a few minutes. She could and she did.

⁵ MacGillivray, A. (2004) *Words that changed the World – Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring*, Cameron House, South Australia

⁶ Mead, T. (1983) *Killers of Eden: The Killer Whales of Twofold Bay*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney

And so, my first encounter with Dot.

Unlike Lionel, Dot is many years my junior. She is warm and welcoming. When she listens to my story about what I'm doing on Iona she listens acutely, fully present to the short conversation we will have. As we part I leave her with my plain request: to perhaps participate in my project and be interviewed about Iona and her place in the life of the island. I leave the usual salient information with her about the scope and purpose of my endeavours and arrange to return in a couple of days, after she has had time to read the material, consider the request and make an informed decision.

In the two days between our first and second meetings I have walked Dot's Iona. Each evening I've dined at the Columba, relishing my one good meal of the day. I've hiked to the summit of Dun I., the island's loftiest peak, and I've been to a couple of gatherings at the restored Abbey. I can't say I know Iona but its history is ever present and imposing and catches even the peripheral vision.

It's midday when I walk into the foyer of the St. Columba Hotel to catch up with Dot, hopeful about her decision to participate. As I'm waiting, a young boy, maybe eight or nine years old, bursts into the place. As Dot emerges from her office to speak with me the boy rushes to her and throws his arms about her waist, clearly overjoyed to see her. The receptionist stationed behind a desk in the foyer smiles broadly at the exchange and I engage with Dot, assuming that this is her son, out of school for his lunch break. Wrong. This is the receptionist's son and Dot his much-loved friend. After humorous exchanges about bypassing Mum the two engage easily and the unselfconscious young boy is effusive in his chatter about school, Dot, lunch and the impending afternoon activities that he'll be engaged in at school. All of the eight primary school children are known to Dot and they have their own vegie garden, which is prominent on the walk between the small village and the St. Columba Hotel. Scarecrows populate the rows of various crops and everything is looking lush, it's summer here.

A couple of days before I leave Iona I go to the Columba for dinner, as usual, when I'm stopped by the receptionist on my way through to the dining room; she calls me over to give me an envelope from Dot who has returned the project information and forms that I provided, along with a short letter:

Dear Jess,

Just in case I don't see you before you leave the island, here are the blank forms you had given me in case you need them for someone else. Also, when I spoke to my mum about your project she immediately mentioned someone called Alastair McIntosh, I'm not sure if you have come across him or any of his work? At one time he worked for the Iona Community (based in Glasgow) and he has done a lot of work on 'place'.

You can buy at least one of his books ('Soil and Soul') in the Iona Community Bookshop – if you haven't heard of him it may be of interest!

Best wishes with your project,

Dot

Yes, Dot had engaged in an interview and she had been open and easy to speak with. She talked about the St. Columba Hotel, and how a group of locals had bought it some years earlier so that it wouldn't fall victim to inappropriate development. She talked about the intentional community – more commonly known as 'the Iona Community' – of which she and her mum were long-standing members. She talked about what sustainability meant to her and I photographed those images that were meaningful and representative of sustainability from her point of view. And when I was done, I went to the Iona Community Bookshop and bought myself a copy of McIntosh's *Soil and Soul*⁷, along with his *Hell and High Water*⁸.

On the evening before I left Iona for the neighbouring island of Mull I started to read *Soil and Soul*. Its storyline is situated in the Hebrides, particularly the islands of Lewis and Eigg. It's about the depths of community life - the vernacular and the unregulated; the ecologies – human and environmental. A vibrant history of crofters, land tenure and political upheaval, the overarching impost of embedded power relations are eventually upended as an island community reclaims the integrity of home.

⁷ McIntosh, A. (2004) *Soil And Soul: People Versus Corporate Power*, Arum Press, London

⁸ McIntosh, A (2008) *Hell and High Water: Climate Change, Hope and the Human Condition*, Birlinn, Edinburgh

The next day I am on the ferry to Fionnphort where I'll bus it to the north-eastern side of Mull. Headed for Salen I'll be carrying more than an oversized backpack; a meeting with place and people, the lie of the land, histories still goading the present through old medieval roads, stone cottages melting back into the landscape. And sustainability? Well, it's an active thing here. The noun just doesn't cut it; the stakes are too high. Sustaining and nurturing and valuing – from the head and the heart and the spirit. The inflection changes - different emphases, diverse ways of living and being – all in the same place.

Background to the Thesis

In establishing the background to this work, I note that just as our collective histories inform the ways in which we meet social-environmental challenges, so too does the more personal dimension of our learning and endeavour carry its defining moments. While this work is not auto-ethnographic, I include the following summary because of the degree to which it informs both the text and artefacts that constitute this thesis. That is, it captures one of the pivotal experiences that shaped on-going work with communities across Australia.

My own meeting with what now passes as sustainability came at a time when neither word nor practice had secured its place in contemporary discourse or social life. In the 1980s, while early registers of social and environmental degradation were seeping into the national landscape, little work was being done on the actual impacts of development and the ways in which it might be mitigated or managed. Instead, the vast majority of social research was largely constituted by sometimes-radical academic commentaries. Notwithstanding their relative value, an unmasking of the neo-liberal retreat from social and environmental justice rested on a very limited engagement in applied primary research. Rather, the battlelines were drawn across a political-discursive-conceptual plane, seldom on the ground that formed the substance of wide-ranging debates. As a consequence, research within the social sciences tended (generally) to rely on data that traced shifts in the national economy, especially with regard to early registers of internationalisation: changing patterns of corporate investment, concentration and centralisation of ownership, mergers and acquisitions, vertical integration and so on. In effect, Australia's developmental trajectory sustained much of the discourse of the time⁹, and while it made a significant contribution to scholarship generally, it tended to move in lockstep with the inevitable transformations that formed the substance of its discourse.

In 1982, dissatisfied with this selective rendering, I set out to undertake primary research¹⁰ in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The aim was

⁹ See for example: Breznjak, M. and Collins, J. (1977), 'The Australian Crisis from Boom to Bust', *Australian Journal of Political Economy*, No. 1, July.

¹⁰ During this period primary research of this kind was more usually referred to as 'applied' social research.

to establish a grounded register of the character of development. In looking to the ways in which local communities navigated the changes that it brought I hoped to capture any registers of structural inequality that were starting to appear in the broader Australian landscape. Less explicitly, I was engaged by the ways in which research of this kind might inform a response to those challenges.

Historically, the national context was one in which the impacts of development had found expression in social dislocation and expanding environmental challenges. From the 1960s onwards many local populations living on the fringe of mines¹¹, forests or waterways¹² were to find themselves confronted with the legacy effects of development; in particular, an increasing burden of disease attributable to extractive industries¹³, along with extensive prospecting and drilling that had opened a vast field of explorative enterprise¹⁴.

By the 1980s things were shifting as political upheaval, industrial growth and entangled social relations started to occupy the foreground of social life¹⁵. Australia was loosening its grip on the economic nationalism that that had thus far protected local manufacturing, pastoral and agricultural industries¹⁶.

¹¹ The blue asbestos mine in Wittenoom was shut down in 1966 after the health impacts of asbestos dust reached intolerable proportions. Situated 1,106 kilometres north-east of Perth in the Hamersley Range of the Pilbara region of Western Australia the town was degazetted in 2007, with tourists being discouraged to venture anywhere near the place by the WA Government. See: Hills, B. (1989) *Blue Murder: Two thousand doomed to die - the shocking truth about Wittenoom's deadly dust*, Sun Books, South Melbourne.

¹² See: Cullen, P. (2005) 'Water: the key to sustainability in a dry land', in J. Goldie, B. Douglas. & B. Furnass (eds), *In Search of Sustainability*, CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, pp. 79-91.

¹³ In 2014 in the township of Morwell in Victoria's Central Gippsland region a mine fire burnt continuously for a period of several weeks, resulting in the evacuation of residents due to toxic impacts on health. See: 'All Is Not Well In The Valley' (<http://www.aboutcarbon.com.au/fossil-fuels/latrobe-valley>); (9 March 2014) 'Morwell mine fire 'under control' after burning for a month' (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/10/morwell-mine-fire-under-control-after-burning-for-a-month>); 'Tim Flannery says coal communities are being kept in dark about dangers' (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/06/tim-flannery-coal-communities-kept-dark>) The Guardian 6 March 2014

¹⁴ More recently, coal-seam gas extraction through the fracturing ('fracking') of sensitive geological sites has resulted in the destabilisation of the water table on which so many local communities rely for their day to day needs.

¹⁵ See: Beilharz, P. (2006) 'The Sixties and Seventies', in *Sociology: Place, Time, Division*, Beilharz, P. and Hogan, T. (eds), Oxford University Press, South Melbourne; Rundle, G. (2006) 'The Eighties and Beyond', op.cit.

¹⁶ Tariff barriers had secured the viability of manufacturing industries in Australia until the 1980's. During the decades that followed most of these industries collapsed under the weight of cheaper imports, with the notable exception of motor vehicle production, which was subsidised by successive governments until 2014.

In the process, a significant shift in the country's economic base was underway and natural resources were set to occupy a far more prominent place in the foreground of economic development¹⁷.

Well positioned in what would become a global market place, the Kimberley and Pilbara¹⁸ regions of Western Australia contained some of the richest deposits of iron ore and other minerals in the world. Rapidly developing economies would soon develop an insatiable appetite for this bounty and the country was set to expand its trade to markets in Asia and beyond. For the Kimberley's smaller coastal communities of Broome, Port Headland and Derby¹⁹ other potentials were being activated. Land development, deep-water ports, tourism, along with all manner of service industries were similarly set to flourish.

Based in Broome, my starting point came through relationships I developed with the staff of the Regional Aboriginal Medical Service (BRAMS²⁰). Often at the forefront of community issues, remote health services usually hold valuable information about the nature of change and development. In the context of the Kimberly and Pilbara regions their remit involved coverage of a vast tract of land. Most of the BRAMS staff, including the manager, were local indigenous people and all carried valuable information beyond their own professional and cultural interests. By arrangement, I was invited to travel with one of the co-ordinators, May Torres, on an extensive journey along the coast and into the desert²¹. In return for support with my research I would be assisting the health service with some of its own²². Whilst exchanges of this kind were not encouraged, particularly in the context of academic research,

¹⁷ See: Blainey, G. (2003) *The Rush That Never Ended. A History of Australian Mining*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton

¹⁸ Lying more than two thousand kilometres from Perth, the capital of Western Australia, the Kimberley and Pilbara regions now constitute two of the largest mining fields in the world. The resource diversity extends to iron ore, rare earth minerals, industrial diamonds, and a host of other resources.

¹⁹ At the time, all of these towns had populations running at 2,000 or less.

²⁰ Broome Regional Aboriginal Medical Service

²¹ The Great Sandy Desert lies approximately 650 kilometres to the northeast of Broome and is a vast tract of open land that contains extensive mineral deposits and pastoral stations.

²² The most pressing request was for some research into local indigenous housing. In some cases as many as 14 people permanently occupied modest 3 bedroom homes. In establishing a research process the necessary evidence was gathered and the service was able to lobby for additional resources. In addition, the process enabled the development of a template for further research.

my own view was that reciprocity constituted a significant element of ethical practice. In this case it resulted in a bond of trust that underscored all of the relationships that I subsequently developed with the service, none more so than with May. With sole responsibility for co-ordinating the WA Trachoma²³ and Eye Health Program she regularly travelled alone into the remoter communities to set up screening programs. Her work constituted both a vital link in the delivery of timely treatment and a point of engagement for other social issues.

As our trip unfolded I was to find myself in a host of small communities that had been pushed to the margins of adjacent towns, in some cases several kilometres from public amenities and shops. Many of these (mostly) indigenous settlements were the result of relocation initiatives that followed in the wake of regional development in mining and pastoralism. For most, inadequate infrastructure was a norm, water supply and garbage removal being two of the most constant challenges. While some of these issues were dealt with along the way, the consistency with which they appeared signalled the disinterest and disinclination of local, state and federal governments to engage, despite overwhelming evidence of need.

When May and I returned to Broome I was led to a range of local initiatives that signalled impending change. Many of the indigenous Broome residents had, like their counterparts in the desert, relocated from places farther afield – some from ‘country’²⁴, others from settlements that could no longer support them. Distinct neighbourhoods or quarters reflected the legacy of indentured

²³ Trachoma is a preventable disease that afflicts the eye; if left untreated it leads to blindness.

²⁴ ‘Country’ refers to tribal land that constitutes a place of belonging. It carries a high order significance that is bound to clan and family. Historically, the absence of any indigenous rights to land had existed since first settlement in 1788. It was not until the historic Mabo Decision in 1992 that the practice of removal from country was curtailed. On 3 June, in *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)*, 12 the High Court recognized native title as a common law property right, rejecting the doctrine of *terra nullius*. The High Court declared that, subject to any acts of extinguishment, the Meriam people are ‘entitled as against the whole world, to possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of the island of Mer’, an exclusive possession form of native title. See: Australian Bureau of Statistics
<http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/1301.0Feature%20Article21995?opendocument>; Indigenous Law Centre: Native Title Timeline
<file:///E:/Mabo%20Decision/Native%20Native%20Timeline%201788-2012.pdf>

labour migrations that had supported the pearling industry²⁵. Drawn from Japan, Malaysia and China, distinct cultural groups had long since found their place in the landscape. Coupled with indigenous settlements, these discrete sections of the town tended to flex enough to accommodate cultural difference. Local life was stabilised around embedded relations and relationships. People fished, shared food and navigated hardship here and there. For most, adaptation was the order of the day and the camps that constituted home for some were well established²⁶.

Yet the consequences of development were inevitable, and by the time I left some months later structural shifts in the local economy were already appearing. This had been a place where people had constantly confronted external colonisation, along with grossly limited state services. Now they would face an escalation in social stresses as an internal colonisation swept across their home. While the more adaptive might find a place in the new ventures set to take over the town, many would not.

Three decades after my time in Broome, Pat Lowe, a local author, would write of the transformation:

Once the noisy site of the local meatworks, the Back Streets were transformed into the Roebuck Estate, a high cost, high density, fenced estate...Estate agents now talk up the adjacent neighbourhood as Old Broome, and housing prices have soared...Few Aboriginal people now live at the Roebuck Estate, a new and metastasising suburb on the outskirts of the town, near the former Native Reserve at One Mile.

As a private development, Roebuck Estate will release no land for public housing within its sterile precincts...(and) the developers have a policy of clearing all native vegetation and planting lawns and exotic trees along the roadways...As if in denial of a reality it neither understands nor accepts, it sits uncomfortably on the edge of the bush, ill at ease within the semi arid natural environment to which Broome belongs. For some time an ominous notice stood at the exit:

'Roebuck Estate: The Future of Broome'²⁷

²⁵ Japanese, Chinese and Malay divers have lived in Broome since the late 19th century. Pay and working conditions were generally harsh but after securing residency many went on to set up small enterprises, mostly grocery stores and eateries.

²⁶ There were the usual 'town camps' and reserves in scrubland on the fringe of the town, but also small, individualized settlements that had been cobbled together by people who were down on their luck: rough huts and lean-to's in the lee of the dunes – all hidden from view.

²⁷ Lowe, P. (2003), 'Broome', in Beilharz, P. and Hogan, T. (eds.), *Sociology: Place, Time, Division*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, pp. 91-94

Despite the fact that the development of this northwest town was debilitating in its impacts, a small but robust counterforce survived. Led by indigenous authors and playwrights²⁸, along with musicians and singer-songwriters²⁹, a local book publishing enterprise³⁰ and eco-tourism ventures filled the void. Yet their success notwithstanding, a worsening of conditions was to become emblematic of the broader impacts on local communities in the region. Trachoma remains a blight on the nation's capacity to care for its citizens³¹, and mortality rates among indigenous people continue to run at significantly higher rates than for non-indigenous³². For newcomers to the Kimberley and Pilbara regions, fly-in-fly-out work contracts now support the mining industry and a host of new lifestyle options have opened small coastal towns along the route to tourism and high-end housing development. In the process, communities and the environments they share have been transformed, seldom with good effect for the permanent residents – human and other.

Predictably enough, the success of development in this setting enjoyed the necessary and sufficient conditions for its unfolding. But a critical element of unrestrained economic growth was also at play. Seldom considered by the commentators of the time, it centred on *remoteness* – remoteness that was to manifest in both *spatial* and *social-relational* distance. In the case of Broome this played out in the way that standards of governance and due diligence were applied. Being so removed from civic and political life was a boon to the new wave of corporate investment, which began with some notable tourist ventures³³.

²⁸ It was during this period that Jimmy Chi, a local Broome resident, wrote *Bran Nue Day*, which was transformed into a film.

²⁹ The Pigram Brothers and Kerry-Ann Cox have enjoyed some success in the music industry well beyond the region.

³⁰ Magabala Books was established in Broome during the 1980's, publishing the work of indigenous and other authors.

³¹ Trachoma has been eradicated in all developed countries except Australia. See: Taylor, H.R., (2001) 'Trachoma in Australia', *Medical Journal of Australia*, 175 (7): pp. 371-372

³² Life expectancy for indigenous males: 67.2 years; non-indigenous males: 78.7 years.

Indigenous females: 72.9 years; non-indigenous females: 82.6 years

See: ABS (2009a) *Experimental Life Tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Australians, 2005-2007*, Cat. no. 3302.0.55.003, ABS, Canberra.

³³ One local dignitary, and even a peer of the realm, weren't slow to get on board - the former engaging in high-risk practices regarding his new caravan park, established with such haste excessive levels of E-Coli were found in the water supply. In the case of the second, Lord MacAlpine, the mooted development of a zoo was set to capitalise on the hoped for influx of tourists.

Over the next twenty-five years or so the resonance of my time in Broome found its full effect in both a personal and a more generalised way. Working in a range of regional, rural and remote areas across Australia it became increasingly evident that the 'management' of human populations, along with built and natural environments, would be synchronised with the advance of neo-liberalism. Where once *spatial remoteness* had supported the unfolding of the northwest, it would now extend to the national level and manifest as *social-relational remoteness* from the challenges that arose in the two decades that followed. Indeed, so embedded did disparity become that during the late 1980s and early 1990s a new political rhetoric took its place on the national stage. Best expressed in the hollow claim that "by 1990 no child shall be living in poverty"³⁴, mounting social stresses saw rates of poverty continue to increase³⁵, while employment, income security³⁶ and public housing stocks³⁷ diminished.

This, then, is what the internationalisation of capital would mean for Australia. Political rhetoric notwithstanding, the nation was set to become reprogrammed in such a way that structured inequality would hereinafter be navigated from a position of increasing detachment, disinterest and disengagement. In effect, the rationalisation of population and environmental management was now co-ordinated through institutional forms that would become socially and politically naturalised.

³⁴ This voluble rhetoric constituted one of the more notable aspirations of Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1987 during the period of his elevation as a 'social reformer'. See: *The Australian*, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/cabinet-papers/hawkes-attempt-to-crush-child-poverty/story-fnkuhyre-1226792570828?nk=4a967a1e652653d52913db03b271b8c4>; *The Age*, 'Hawke regrets child poverty comment', June 16, 2007, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/National/Hawke-regrets-child-poverty-comment/2007/06/16/1181414583336.html>

³⁵ "Luxury And Poverty: Economic Inequalities in Australia", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 30, 1971, p. 23. More recently, the 2012 Australian Council of Social Services Report: *Poverty in Australia* reveals that in 2010 an estimated 2,265,000 people (12.5% of all people, including 575,000 or 17% of all children) lived in households below the most austere poverty line. See: http://acoss.org.au/uploads/html/ACOSS_PovertyReport2012.html

³⁶ See: Holmes, D., Hughes, K., Julian, R. (eds.) (2007) *Australian Sociology: A Changing Society*, Pearson Education Australia, NSW, pp. 372-377

³⁷ Report on Government Services: Housing and Homelessness Services 2010/11: http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/105360/076-partg-sectorsummary.pdf; http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/the_road_home.pdf; <http://www.facs.gov.au/sa/housing/progserv/homelessness/whitepaper/Documents/default.htm>

We had learned, often by default, to become risk-takers on a scale hitherto unimagined³⁸. More to the point, we managed those risks in the same fashion that we approached the emerging variants of scientific research – rationally, from a distance, and probabilistically. In effect, the scale of these challenges in both Australia and the rest of the world throughout the period led directly to what Beck and others have tagged ‘rational risk assessment’ – a process that draws upon ‘best knowledge (science) about rates and probabilities regarding hazards in the service of choosing ‘least dangerous alternatives’³⁹. Supported by much of the scholarly discourse that engaged with social life from the 1990s onwards, the natural environment was duly excised from the frame of reference. While some notable exceptions now prevail within environmental sociology⁴⁰, human ecology⁴¹ and eco-feminism⁴², it is more generally the case that human exemptionalism⁴³ prevails.

Yet despite the dystopic effects of development in both local and national settings, a counterforce emerges through new forms of civic engagement. Here publics are mobilising around high-risk industrial activity that leaves toxic waste in its path, along with extractive industries that decimate the ground of community life. Constituting quite specific targets, these activities

³⁸ Beck, U., (2000), ‘Risk Society Revisited: Theory, Politics, and Research Programmes’, in Adam, B., Beck, U., van Loon, J. (Eds.), *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues for Social Theory*, Sage, London pp. 211–229.

³⁹ Beck, U., (2000) ‘Risk Society Revisited: Theory, Politics, and Research Programmes’, in: Adam, B., Beck, U., van Loon, J. (Eds.), *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues for Social Theory*, Sage, London, p.81

⁴⁰ See: Dunlap, R. & Caton, W. (2002) ‘Which functions of the Environment do we study? A Comparison of Environmental and Natural Resource Sociology’, *Society and Natural Resources*, 15, 239–49; Redclift, M & Woodgate, G. (eds.) (2005) *New Developments in Environmental Sociology*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK; Redclift, M & Woodgate, G. (eds.) (1997) *The International Handbook of Environmental Sociology*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK;

⁴¹ See: McIntosh, A (2005) *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power*, Aurum Press, London; McIntosh, A (2005) *Hell and High Water: Climate Change, Hope and the Human Condition*, Birlinn, Edinburgh

⁴² Ecofeminism’s general engagement is with the ways in which environmental mismanagement and degradation is heavily gendered, impacting disproportionately on women, indigenous communities, marginalized and exploited groups as well as on the collective of species that constitute the natural environment. See: Kabeer, N (1994) *Reversed Realities*, Verso, London; Krauss, C. (1993) ‘Blue-Collar Women and Toxic-Waste Protests: the Process of Politicization’, in Richard Hofrichter (ed.), *Toxic Struggles*, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia; Plumwood, V. (1993) *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, London; Rowbotham, S., (1973) *Hidden from History*, Pluto, London

⁴³ Riley Dunlap, noted for his contribution to the development of Environmental Sociology, focuses on the fundamental assumption embedded in the sociology of the 70’s and 80’s that human societies are exempt from the physical world of nature. See: Dunlap, R. in Redclift, M. & Woodgate, G. (eds.) (1997) *The International Handbook of Environmental Sociology*, Edward Elgar, UK, pp. 21–22.

have led regional communities to challenge the rights of ‘prospectors’ to enter private holdings⁴⁴. Some local communities concerned with the impacts of carbon emissions have developed collectively owned and operated carbon neutral power generation initiatives⁴⁵, just as philanthropic trusts and NGOs have taken up some of the more pressing structural issues, in one case successfully establishing an international, sustainable home-ownership strategy for people at risk of homelessness⁴⁶.

While these initiatives may appear minor in the grander scheme of untrammelled development, the battlelines are now drawn across many fronts, to the degree that communities of place have become a prospective site for co-creative endeavours in social-environmental management. Importantly, necessity and invention have diminished reliance on (or trust in) partnerships with state and corporate interests, and while there is no evidence that localised initiatives have reached a critical mass, they do nonetheless signal a range of possibilities with regard to community sustainability.

In situating the context of this work in both a personal and broader conceptual manner, my focus has been on the relational dynamic between people, place and development. Yet the lessons learned in navigating its various techno-scientific-economic applications have less to do with development-in-general, and more with the ways in which it infuses governments, governance and institutionalised mechanisms. Here, relations of power operating within the spheres of production, consumption and marketization have usually enjoyed unfettered advancement. More recently, however, economies have become far more fragile than would otherwise have been the case had the health of people, place and multivariate species been factored into the calculus as an integral component of development itself.

⁴⁴ See: ABC/CSG + water: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/coal-seam-gas-by-the-numbers/>;

Coal seam gas: lock the gate alliance http://www.lockthegate.org.au/about_coal_seam_gas

⁴⁵ See: Hepburn Wind Co-operative, Media Release 2009: info@hepburnwind.com.au; <http://2degreesproject.com.au/Story/Victorian-town-wipes-out-its-carbon-footprint-for-power-generation>

⁴⁶ Habitat for Humanity is a global NGO that enables disadvantaged people to engage with building and owning their own homes. See: www.habitatforhumanity.org.au

Introduction

Intending Community: At The Margins

The generalised, global claim on sustainability in both theory and practice has, for some decades, occupied a far more prominent place than that of local communities. Indeed, international environmental brokerage is more usually engaged with a social-environmental-developmental imperative that drives consensus about what needs to be done to sustain life at a *planetary* level⁴⁷. To this end, sustainability has become a unifying textual motif that draws various forces together in a common cause, yet the actual playing out of this process exposes competing interests engaged less with resolving the militating impacts of development, and more with circumventing any impacts on their *specific* interests. As Davison notes:

With contests about sustainability resisting authoritative conclusion, the mere presence of governing forces and actors within the sustainability throng is enough to set default bearings, ushering diverse interests down a single path. To permit travel in other directions it is vital that questions of the history and geography of power, questions of hegemony, be placed at the centre of contests about sustainability.⁴⁸

In turning to community life as a potential research context within which sustainability might be situated, one encounters not the international vehicles of environmental governance, but rather, the liberal state. Here, the character of (most) liberal democracies is not formed by the meaningful and ongoing elaboration of an ecocentric consciousness that might guide sustainability-in-practice. Rather, the moral-ethical dimension of social, environmental, and developmental processes are calibrated against the various interests at play. Manifest in the political-institutional domain of (national) governments, environmental policy, planning and implementation more usually find themselves destabilized by virtue of the fact that they sit on the shifting sands of partisan-political and corporate imperatives.

⁴⁷ See, for example, the extended range of UN Conventions on climate change alone: United Nations (9 May 1992), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; UNFCCC (6 May 2012a), Meetings: Copenhagen Climate Change Conference; UNFCCC (21 May 2012b), (nationally appropriate mitigation actions of developing country Parties); UNFCCC (23 August 2012c); UNFCCC (28 May 2013b), Rev.2: Compilation of information on nationally appropriate mitigation actions to be implemented by developing country Parties.

⁴⁸ Davison, A. (2008) 'Contesting Sustainability in theory-practice: In praise of ambivalence', *Continuum*, 22: 2, p. 191

In responding to the need to recalibrate the ways in which a broader polity might be engaged, Matthews notes that 'liberal democracies as vehicles for ecocentric environmentalism...provide neither the moral nor the ontological basis for ecocentric consciousness', rather 'small egalitarian communities are more suited to this end. Such communities...help to cultivate relational – and hence ecological – identities...they also constitute a political instrument well adapted to resisting the environmentally destructive forces of transnational capitalism, and perhaps to assuming environmental administrative and co-ordinative roles as well.'⁴⁹

Implicit in Davison's insights with regard to sustainability, and Mathew's contention with regard to its relocation in community settings, are the critical drivers that might move sustainability toward enactment. In Davison's case, 'the history and geography of power (and) questions of hegemony (should) be placed at the centre of contests about sustainability'.⁵⁰ By implication, the underlying *circumstances and values* that inform sustainability-in-practice must occupy the foreground of our thinking about what it takes to sustain any social-natural environment. For Mathews, the character of community life is itself constitutive of the relational connections necessary to its enactment, particularly because the 'moral and ontological basis for ecocentric consciousness' is more likely to be found there. To these I add the place of necessity and invention. That is, the impost of any environmental-climatic challenges will, by their very nature, register at the level of the locale, and as a consequence have to be dealt with there⁵¹.

In acknowledging the value of an engagement that takes us down to the ground of community life, it must similarly be acknowledged that the importance of local life to the project of sustainability would be diminished were it not situated within a broader international context. In establishing the relational dynamic between these two spheres, the locale is better understood as integral, rather than marginal to the overall project of sustainability. This is

⁴⁹ Matthews, F. (1995) 'Community and the Ecological Self', *Environmental Politics*, vol. 4, no.4, p.1

⁵⁰ Davison, A. (2008) 'Contesting Sustainability in theory-practice: In praise of ambivalence', *Continuum*, 22: 2, p. 191

⁵¹ Knox, J. (2009), "Linking human rights and climate change at the United Nations", *Harvard Environmental Law Review*, Vol. 33, pp. 476-498

particularly pressing when we acknowledge that the threat of climatic and environmental destabilisation has escalated to the point where it registers at the *international* level. Given that this is no longer contestable as a global reality⁵², the fact that the lifeworld of the locale has been progressively written out of a broader discourse on sustainability calls attention to both the conceptual and practical limits of the process. Indeed, shifts in emphasis and engagement with the challenges we currently face centre on the fact that communities around the world now constitute a *constant* locus of social-environmental-climatic change. From the swelling tides that threaten island nations such as the Maldives⁵³, to the Arctic melt that will reorder Greenland's ecology⁵⁴, the only coherence, it seems, is in the overall impacts that are now being registered.

In accounting for this state of play, the preeminent place that climate change now occupies in international discourse exposes a displacement process that has pushed *environments* and *species* to the margins of international engagement, to the degree that the contextual frame has become *climatic* and *planetary*. This emerges as a critical consideration when we confront the assumption that these threats can be mitigated through internationalised, consensus-driven models of action⁵⁵. Arising sequentially and incrementally, each successive round of conferences, summits, accords and charters has carried with it an increasing level of revision and refinement, yet without a consistent register of achievements with regard to abatement goals and targets. In short, the threats to climate stability are increasing variably, not

⁵² See: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2013), *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Stocker, T.F., D. Qin, G.K. Plattner, M. Tignor, S.K. Allen, J. Boschung, A. Nauels, Y. Xia, V. Bex and P.M. Midgley (eds.)], Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA

⁵³ Knox, J. (2009), 'Linking human rights and climate change at the United Nations', *Harvard Environmental Law Review*, Vol. 33, pp. 476-498

⁵⁴ E. Rignot, I. Velicogna, M. R. van den Broeke, A. Monaghan, and J. Lenaerts (2011) 'Acceleration of the contribution of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets to sea level rise', *Geophysical Research Letters*, Vol. 38, pp. 1-5

⁵⁵ See, for example, the extended range of UN Conventions on climate change alone: United Nations (9 May 1992), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; UNFCCC (6 May 2012a), Meetings: Copenhagen Climate Change Conference; UNFCCC (21 May 2012b), (nationally appropriate mitigation actions of developing country Parties); UNFCCC (23 August 2012c); UNFCCC (28 May 2013b), Rev.2: Compilation of information on nationally appropriate mitigation actions to be implemented by developing country Parties.

abating uniformly⁵⁶, and just as the characteristic forms of degradation and threat have shifted, so too the emphases of particular international accords⁵⁷.

By contrast, the dispersed initiatives that find purchase closer to the ground of day-to-day life are, by their very nature, locally driven and seldom a direct function of state sponsorship or intervention. While strategies that do result in emergent forms of civic engagement with sustainability-in-practice call attention to themselves, their scale and scope is variable, and as yet not well known or understood. Given that community life occupies no discernible place within international environmental brokerage, and accounting for the fact that it will be impacted by any failures at both international and national levels, some account must be taken of the ways in which communities are dealing with the challenges that confront them. More to the point, perhaps, community engagement with environmental threats, mitigation and innovation may yield some important lessons for both national governments and international brokers.

In responding to these challenges and opportunities, this thesis contributes to current research and discourse into sustainability through an extensive primary research process that took place in Australia and Scotland between 2010 and 2012. Drawing on scholarship in both the physical and social sciences, the thesis advances the case for a more expanded and comprehensive approach to sustainability. Engaging with communities of place, local lifeworlds are positioned *within* the overall project of planetary sustainability and individual voices are repositioned as central, rather than marginal to the process.

⁵⁶ IPCC AR4 WG3 (2007), Metz, B.; Davidson, O. R.; Bosch, P. R.; Dave, R.; and Meyer, L. A., (eds.) *Climate Change 2007: Mitigation of Climate Change, Contribution of Working Group III (WG3) to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)*, Cambridge University Press

⁵⁷ See: Kanie, N. (2007) 'Governance with Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements: A healthy or ill-equipped fragmentation?' in Walter Hoffmann and Lydia Swart (eds.), *Environmental Governance: Perspectives on the Current Debate*, New York, Center for UN Reform Education Global: pp. 67-86

Reading the Thesis

Constituted by two texts, the more orthodox printed format provides a comprehensive account of all elements of both the primary and secondary research. Supported by a digital artefact, a more intimate, sensory dimension to place, space and home is presented. The artefact has been designed not as a product, but as an embedded feature of the thesis. Each discrete movie constitutes an abridged account of interviews that I conducted with contributors on site in Australia and Scotland. A full account appears in Part Two of the Thesis.

The accompanying DVD contains all of the movies that were developed. The running time is approximately eighty minutes.

Because the thesis develops a comprehensive account of research sites and community contributors it is suggested that readers navigate all of the written text prior to watching the DVD.

Establishing the Research Questions and Aims

Given the contestable nature of sustainability alluded to in the Introduction, the starting point for this research was one in which sustainability carried an open status. Designed to elicit *individual* views, values and activities with regard to the way in which sustainability is enacted, there were no prescriptive or definitive precepts applied to the term.

In centralising individual voices, the underlying aim was to open a space in which a fuller and more comprehensive account of sustainability-in-practice could be captured. Importantly, constructions of sustainability are not merely discursive or 'given'. Rather, they evolve and adapt to a range of social, environmental and personal considerations. Here, the multiple meanings that steer sustainability-in-practice provide a fuller and more authentic rendering of the forces at work that draw people into processes that sustain and enhance local lifeworlds.

Research Questions

1. What **meaning** does sustainability hold at the individual level?
2. What **personal values** inform individual views of community life and its sustainability?
3. What **guiding precepts or intentions** help activate specific, individual engagements in community life?

In alignment with the Research Questions the following Aims were developed.

Research Aims

1. To capture the range of **personal-subjective meanings** attributed to sustainability by individual participants in specified community settings
2. To render the range of **personal values** that inform views of community life and its sustainability
3. To locate the **guiding precepts or personal intentions** of individuals that drive identifiable engagements in the sustainability of community life

The Research Sites

In Australia

St. Leonards, a small village of about 1700 people, lies on the western arc of Port Phillip Bay in Victoria, tucked just inside Port Phillip Heads. Located on the Bellarine Peninsula, St. Leonards lies a few kilometres between the townships of Queenscliff to the west and Port Arlington to the east. Its chequered history echoes the European colonisation of indigenous lands throughout most of Australia during the early nineteenth century. Current estimates vary in terms of the length of indigenous settlement; archaeological surveys of St. Leonards date indigenous occupation to about 25,000 years⁵⁸.

When Lt. James Tucker conducted the first European survey in 1803, the Bengalit people, a clan of the Wathaurong tribe, Kulin Nation, occupied the area. After Tucker's departure the next European contact came with William Buckley, an escaped convict who fled a penal settlement at Sorrento, on the opposite side of Port Phillip Bay. Arriving in 1804, Buckley was incorporated into the clan and spent the next 32 years in their company. When John Batman, a Tasmanian grazier, landed at St. Leonards in 1835, the lives of all indigenous people in the area were completely upended. Buckley became something of a broker between the two worlds, translating and negotiating between the Europeans and the clan, and establishing a degree of protection for the indigenes. Yet the faltering first steps of settlement were to end in the dispatch of the clans to other areas, and occasionally in their co-opting into what would become the developing township.

By the mid-1860's a small group of Chinese settlers had made home in St. Leonards. With the gold rush coming to a close they adapted to life in their new country through a capacity for diverse industry. Fishing and food processing meant that they were able to export some of their dried catch to China as a local enterprise, but with land grabbing prominent amongst the European settlers most had left the area by the 1870's, seeking more permanent work elsewhere⁵⁹. In the wake of these changes, St. Leonards

⁵⁸ Munster, P.M. (2008), *A History of St. Leonards*, St. Leonards Progress Association, Geelong, p.2

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.37

went through several transformations, ultimately emerging as a working class town that drew immigrants from Greece and Italy during the mid-twentieth century. Now settled by an increasing number of older people in search of a sea change the town has earned itself the appellation of 'God's waiting room'. With concentrations of people in the over 60's cohort at record levels St. Leonards has a skewed demographic, with much lower numbers of younger families. The effect of this social mix has left the town with underdeveloped local infrastructure, transport and service development – the assumption being that older retirees have the funds to meet their needs without any external state supports.

Bambra

Unlike the other villages and towns that form the basis of this work, Bambra remains the only one that does not formally constitute a town. It shares its postcode with Winchelsea, and announces itself to the traveller through signage, but with a resident population of no more than 60 people Bambra has remained what it always was, a place that drew dairy and sheep framers together, along with a level of agroforestry business. For a time, deposits of brown coal tempted developers to establish an extractive industry rivalling Yallourn, in the Latrobe Valley – Victoria's largest open-cut coal mine - but local protest stalled the push of these entrepreneurs.

Characterised by undulating hills Bambra lies tucked away in the rising ground of the Otway Ranges in western Victoria. Its out-of-the-way location constitutes something of an escape from regional and urban life, with a few small eateries and little else by way of development. A few hobby farms are now scattered amongst the older, established properties but there is little sign of population increase.

Despite its relative isolation, Bambra presented an opportunity to engage with a single initiative that had unfolded over a period of at least twenty years. Inspired by one man, a small plantation of native hardwood represented more than greening the scene. In many respects, this initiative captured deeper meaning and personal values with regard to the importance of the natural environment.

In Scotland

The Isle of Iona

Three miles from north to south and one and a half miles east to west, Iona is a small Hebridean island with a rich history. Lying off the west coast of its near neighbour, the Isle of Mull, a one-mile ferry crossing transports people, food and other resources to its shores. In winter, inclement weather sometimes disrupts the ferry crossings, as a consequence islanders are acutely aware of the elements and the part they play in day-to-day life.

What sets Iona apart from most islands and small communities around the world is the intentionality that frames its enduring place in the landscape. Guided by spiritual-religious values that are grounded in an ecumenical, as opposed to a doctrinaire theosophy, sustainability registers not only through its spiritual underpinnings, but also in a range of complimentary initiatives that align with the more usual practices that we attribute to green environmentalism.

Apart from this feature of local life there is also long-established community of islanders who are not members of the intentional community. These permanent residents constitute the families who number among the storeowners, crofters, hotel proprietors, managers and sundry workers. In many respects this makes Iona home to two communities whose connections and interests often overlap.

In so far as its history is concerned, the presence of the past registers on Iona in a range of ways. The intentional community, most commonly identified with the restored 13th century Benedictine Abbey and its surrounding buildings, grew out of the efforts of the Reverend George McLeod. In 1938, McLeod went to Iona on a 'work and worship' mission, one aligned with social justice⁶⁰. Recruiting ministers to work on the island to rebuild accommodation near the site of the abbey, MacLeod's supporters were being primed for their work in inner city and housing scheme areas in Glasgow during a period of general social distress and poverty. Subsequently

⁶⁰ McIntosh, A. (2004) *Soil And Soul: People Versus Corporate Power*, Arum Press, London, p.242

honoured for his efforts, Reverend Lord MacLeod had a focus on broad social challenges, including disarmament and anti-nuclear protest. My understanding is that MacLeod didn't actually set out with an intentional community in mind, however through its various transformations this is effectively what evolved. Today, the intentional community has about 350 permanent members, some of whom live locally, others further afield in Edinburgh and Glasgow and some as far afield as the USA, Australia and other European countries.

For a small island on the edge of the pond (the Atlantic), Iona has, like other Hebridean islands, something of a bloody and tumultuous history⁶¹. Initially settled by Indo-European Celts, the prehistory of both Iona and neighbouring Mull dates to the second century CE. Bringing the Iron Age with them, the Celts colonised both islands. Characterised by a warring disposition they successfully defended the Isles against a range of would-be invaders and ultimately infused local life with what is now its Irish-Scottish heritage.

Over time a degree of cultural fusion resulted in a more unified and settled Celtic-Scots society. Generally pagan in character, life on Iona remained relatively undisrupted until 563 CE, when Columba arrived from Ireland. As a prince of that country Columba was a devoted Christian and follower of St. Patrick. Running counter to popular history Columba did not set out as a missionary, as is often assumed, but rather, took himself and twelve companions to Iona on a self-imposed exile. As the story goes, Columba had devoted himself to a religious life. When one of his contemporaries, Fenian, returned from Rome with a copy of the first Vulgates⁶² to appear in Ireland, Columba's request for a copy was refused. Determined to acquire the text Columba secretly managed to secure a copy, but when his cohorts discovered this breach he was ordered to surrender it.

Despite the intervention of the High King, Columba entered into what was to become a bitter dispute that resulted in a pitched battle between opposing

⁶¹ Macnab, P.A. (1995) *Mull And Iona*, Pevensey Press, Devon, pp. 89-101

⁶² The Vulgates constitute a simplified translation of the Christian bible. Translated by Jerome, it translated the original Latin text and also revised earlier versions. See: Macnab, P.A. (1995) *Mull And Iona*, Pevensey Press, Devon, pp. 93-94

factions. After the bloodshed and deaths that followed, Columba's guilt and remorse took hold and he resolved to remove himself from his home shores, never to return. This self-imposed penance took him into an exile where he was determined to ensure that wherever he made home he would not be able to see Ireland. After retreating to the Garvelloch Islands in the Firth of Lorne, and with Ireland still in plain view, Columba dispatched himself and his followers to Iona, where Ireland remained a distant memory, finally obscured from view.

Significant to Iona's history is the fact that what Columba had set in place was to flourish in the seven centuries that followed. Due largely to his drive, this hive of pagan activity was transformed into a Christian centre that drew pilgrims and scholars from all over the world. Known broadly as the 'University of the North' and the 'Cradle of Christianity in Scotland', Iona became a centre for the arts, led largely by the resident monks and craftspeople who were to produce extensive carvings, grave slabs, Celtic crosses and manuscripts. Even the much-feted Book of Kells⁶³ found a home here until the Reformation of 1561, when the abbeys of monks and friars were demolished by an act of the Scottish parliament.

As Macnab notes:

Iona became a target for bigoted and vindictive vandalism, worse even than the acts of the pagan Norsemen. Buildings were demolished; of the 360 carved crosses said to have been displayed only three survive today. Worst of all, the great library was sacked, and its treasures of art and literature going back to the days of Columba were all destroyed. Fortunately the Book of Kells was saved and taken to Ireland, and a few of the treasures that could be conveniently handled were taken by the fleeing monks to Dublin, Paris, Rome and elsewhere.⁶⁴

Throughout this transformation in island life Iona was to find itself passed from the MacDonalds to the MacLeans and eventually to the Dukes of Argyll, where it remains. In 1899 the 8th Duke of Argyll made over the vandalised sacred buildings to the Church of Scotland for the use of all Christian denominations, in the hope that some restoration would be carried out.

⁶³ The Book of Kells, so named because it was produced in the town of that name in the Republic of Ireland, was a manuscript of the gospels created by the town monks in the eighth century.

⁶⁴ Macnab, P.A. (1995) *Mull And Iona*, Pevensey Press, Devon, pp. 99-100

Today, maintenance and restoration of the Abbey proceeds and is largely carried out by the Trustees of Iona Abbey Limited, guided by Historic Scotland, the governing body for all such works.

During the summer volunteers spend up to six weeks in service at Iona's intentional community, many travelling from as far afield as the USA and Australia. Apart from the ongoing work done there the many hundreds of day-trippers who visit the abbey support a small tourist industry that is the mainstay of island life. A regular influx of seasonal workers take up jobs in the guest houses, hotels and stores and while some of these staff are local, many travel from eastern Europe where economies are generally languishing and work hard to find.

The Isle of Mull

On the Isle of Mull, third largest of the Western Isles, the impacts of invasion ranged from the benign to the turbulent. Two centuries after Columba's death, and with the impacts of his Christian ethos well embedded, Mull was to find itself invaded by the Vikings. This Norse colonization dominated the landscape from around the eighth to the thirteenth century and left behind its legacy in fortifications and language. Many of the place names throughout the islands and highlands still register this feature of the invasion. On Mull the ratio of Norse to Gaelic place names remains at 1:1⁶⁵. Eventually, the Norse presence was eradicated through a series of clan battles that set in place the overarching system of social organization that would prevail for four centuries in the Western Isles.

What changed this enduring arrangement was the Highland Clearances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Subsequent to the battle of Culloden in 1746, the clan system found itself largely dismantled when the English army, led by the Duke of Cumberland, dispatched the last of the Jacobites, along with their leader, Bonnie Prince Charlie. In reprisal for their 'last stand' Cumberland sent his troops through Highlands and Islands to obliterate Gaelic resistance. In 1747, the Act of Proscription and the Disarming Act collectively prohibited free assembly, the carrying of arms and the wearing of

⁶⁵ Macnab, P.A. (1995) *Mull And Iona*, Pevensey Press, Devon, pp. 42-53

culturally specific dress (tartan, kilt and so on). Importantly, Jacobite clan chiefs were dispossessed of their lands, dissenters executed⁶⁶.

With the dispatch of clan leaders indigenous islanders were increasingly cleared from the lands on which they had subsisted, and much of the Isle of Mull was opened up to the more profitable enterprise of (Cheviot) sheep farming. Whilst some of the peasantry left for distant shores, many wound up working on roads, drains, walls, fences and piers. Paid only in oatmeal and other food, many perished⁶⁷.

Throughout the clearances, and subsequently during the Scottish Enlightenment, land grabbing became associated with 'improvements'. Quite apart from significant changes to land management and farming, new industries, land-leasing arrangements and estates came to characterise life on Mull.

Today Mull's cultural history registers in buildings, roads and bridges, along with the vestiges of old estates, churches, standing stones and cairns. Its topographic-geological character reveals an extensive range of lochs, rivers, seaways, mountains and other environmental characteristics that support a thriving tourist industry. The two villages of Salen and Fionnphort lie at opposite sides of Mull and proved to be equally important research sites, not only because of their differences from each other, but also with regard to neighbouring Iona.

Fionnphort (*Feen-fort*)

Fionnphort lies on the south-western shores of Mull and is the port of departure for Iona. From its shores the entire east side of Iona can be seen, including the Abbey and town centre. The main road in the village leads down to the island of Erraid, one of the locations in the feature film of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*. A village of about 80 people, it shares much of its history with Iona, particularly the Celtic invasion and the impacts of Columba and his missionaries. As is the case with many of the western isles,

⁶⁶ McIntosh, A. (2004) *Soil And Soul: People Versus Corporate Power*, Arum Press, London, p.88

⁶⁷ Macnab, op.cit., pp. 55-64

tourism and fishing constitute the mainstay of economic life.

Such is the isolation of Fionnphort that in 2008 the villagers celebrated the arrival of a cash machine (ATM). With no local bank they had been making a 100-mile round-trip to Salen to deposit and draw funds. Sandy Brunton, the local postmaster, said that residents are claiming they now have the best view from a cash dispenser anywhere in Britain: "As you stand at the ATM, you have a view of Iona to the west, Coll to the north and looking east you can see the island's only Munro, Ben More."⁶⁸

Here I encountered a long established, vernacular tradition where individual interests were supported through good will and exchanges in kind. This was best expressed through the activities of a recent 'incomer' who had tried to engage residents in transforming Fionnphort into a Transition Town. Whilst she met with polite resistance and went through the usual frustrations that arise when a great idea languishes for want of enthusiasm, the locality she now called home provided some significant opportunities to examine the world and its workings from a local vantage point. Over time she found herself settling into a quite different way of living, one that demanded more attunement with the locale.

Salen (*Sah-len*)

This close-knit village of about 250-300 people lies on the northeast side of Mull and connects Craignure and Tobermory, major centres and ports. There are a few shops, a primary school of about 80 children, a small pub and a few guest-houses. As is the case with the rest of Mull, Salen and its history are bound to invasions and clearances, evidenced by the relics of old estates, as well as its medieval bridges and roads.

⁶⁸ Mair, George (18 April 2008) "Village-gets-hole-in-the-wall" (<http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/scotland/Village-gets-hole-in-the.3995981.jp>) *The Scotsman*, Edinburgh.

Meeting the Challenge

In taking up the challenge of locating sustainability in communities of place my starting point is an acknowledgement that when human and natural systems are as uncoupled as they currently are, the meaning attributed to both community and sustainability is impoverished. Moving from a review of the literature in which community is currently theorized and navigated, sustainability is situated, not as the separate and inherited project of international environmental brokerage, but rather, as an active and participatory process that engages all elements of place.

The Nature of Community: Complexity and Coherence

Constructions of community are as various as the worlds that they describe and define, as are the contests about what constitutes or qualifies as community. Indeed, the various disciplinary and epistemological strands that pull notions of community into contest and debate sweep across a broad arc. Consider Cohen's⁶⁹ *Symbolic Construction of Community* which accounts for the *symbolic-cultural* elements of belonging to a community, as well as *communities of meaning*. In contrast Anderson's⁷⁰ focus is on the spread of *imagined communities*, where membership is asserted on the basis of nationality. For Hoggett⁷¹ *contested communities* are those spaces of social diversity where the ways in which we define ourselves are contrasted with the characteristics ascribed by outsiders. For Theodori⁷², interactional theory ascribes to community '*...a place-oriented process of interrelated actions through which members of a local population express a shared sense of identity while engaging in the common concerns of life*'⁷³.

In responding to the value and limits of these constructions some overriding assumptions warrant further consideration. In particular, and running counter to most of the prevailing orthodoxy, the boundaries of community

⁶⁹ Cohen, A. P. (1985) *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Tavistock: London

⁷⁰ Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, revised ed., Verso, London

⁷¹ Hoggett, P. (ed.) (1997) *Contested Communities: experiences, struggles, policies*, Policy Press, Bristol

⁷² Theodori, G. (2005) 'Community and Community Development in Resource-Based Areas: Operational Definitions Rooted in and Interactional Perspective', *Society and Natural Resources*, 18: 663

may be as fluid as they are fixed. Additionally, the locale associated with a particular community may refuse the assumption of robust human bonds that are said to produce co-operation and shared identity. Indeed, the internal life of any community may be as subject to the vagaries of human values as it will be to their strong suit in a sense of belonging and neighbourliness. To therefore override the very real and substantive tensions that can and do live within communities is, then, to ignore the complexities of local life that impact significantly on the capacity of human beings to sustain themselves in relation to one another, as well as their individual and collective will to engage with the environments in which they take up residence.

Given these considerations, this work takes as its starting point the idea that community manifests on common ground. Setting aside the differential meanings outlined above, unifying principles of association and belonging - whether to neighbourhood, networks, place or polities - have tended to remain as constant signifiers⁷⁴, in some respects echoing the foundational precepts of *human* association developed by Tönnies⁷⁵ in the nineteenth century. During the period, community was characterised by close connection and bonds, and contrasted sharply with society, a broader space of association that had less to do with cohesion and more with self-interest.

With the advance of the industrial revolution, especially from the late eighteenth century onwards, urban and rural development left its mark as transformations in local life led to increasing complexity and dislocation. Blurring the boundaries between the two domains, close association became less certain as a feature of local, day-to-day life. Referencing the period, Messing⁷⁶ notes that the technological changes that accompanied rapid industrialisation ultimately centralised the market as a primary institution. Spurred by new, highly mechanised production process, towns and cities displaced neighbourhood, just as '...the business firm or corporation replaced

⁷⁴ See Clark, A. (2007) 'Understanding Community: A review of networks, ties and contacts' (Working Paper), ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, University of Manchester. www.reallifemethods.ac.uk

⁷⁵ Tönnies, F. (1967) *Community and Society*, Harper and Row, New York

⁷⁶ Messing, A. (2009) 'An Outsider's Sociology of Self, *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self Knowledge*, VII, 3, Summer, 155-172

the family, the manor and the guild as the dominant economic institution'⁷⁷. Within this temporal context, the general shift away from communal coherence proceeded apace, as did the losses it brought with it.

In its more contemporary construction 'community' has fuelled a research-led engagement with change and development arising beyond the immediacy of the locale, but as Delanty notes:

The revival of community today is undoubtedly connected with the crisis of belonging and its relation to place. Globalized communications, cosmopolitan political projects and transnational mobilities have given new possibilities to community at precisely the same time that capitalism has undermined the traditional forms of belonging. But these new kinds of communities – which in effect are reflexively organized social networks of individual members – *have not been able to substitute anything for place, other than the aspirations for belonging*. Whether community can establish a connection with place, or remain as an imagined condition, will be important...in the future.⁷⁸
[Emphasis added]

Critical to Delanty's insight is the extended nature of the communal and the various social and cultural contexts that it occupies. Here, the inflection is toward place as a site of *human* belonging. That is, the notion of *local human placement* is far more prominent than is a broader reading of the multiplicity of interactive relationships within and between local worlds.

Less abstract yet still concerned with notions of human belonging, Calthorpe and Fulton move toward communities of place as '... complex, human-scaled places that combine many elements of living: public, private, work and home. They mix different kinds of people and activities in close proximity and...create shared places that are unique to each neighborhood and shape a social geography intimately known only by those who live or work there... They are hard to design but easy to design away. And they are essential to our well-being - not just in times of crisis, but also in living our everyday lives.'⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *ibid.* p. 164.

⁷⁸ Delanty, G., (2003) *Community*, Routledge, London, p. 195

⁷⁹ Calthorpe, P., and Fulton, W. (2001) *The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl*, Island Press, Washington, DC, p. 31

Communities of Place

A more extensive articulation of community draws together contributions from a wide range of authors who are expressly concerned with the challenges to local communities as they strive to sustain local lifeworlds. With an eye for global-local relations, *Communities of Place*⁸⁰ focuses on local adaptation as it meets the force and impost of external threat and regulation. Here, sustainability is contextualised within environmental-ecological and human systems, as well as the broader corporatized systems that occupy bioregions. Given the context of this work, I chose to adopt the characterisation 'communities of place' and extend it to include local topographic features and geographic locations that incorporate human beings in continuous residence, association or relation, *along with* various species of indigenous and introduced flora and fauna.

The impetus for adopting this approach lies with the focus of the work: *community sustainability*. In acknowledging the relevance and validity of local-social bonds that may apply to place, the broader physical-environmental milieu about which those bonds develop stands as equally relevant, yet seldom as prominent. Now more than at any other time we are pressed to consider not only how we might sustain *human* life, but increasingly to give substantive consideration to the nexus that pulls 'us' and 'them', or 'this' and 'that', into direct relation. That is, we cannot and have never managed to prevail in anything other than *direct relation* to the various lives about us. As Dunlap and Catton note, an earth that is simultaneously sustenance base, sink and home⁸¹ supports all of these, *in constant and dynamic relation*.

While the emergence of sustainability is covered in more depth in Chapter Four, the following review accounts for its many iterations, along with the forces that gave expression to its transformations.

⁸⁰ Maida, C.A. (ed.) (2007) *Communities of Place*, Berghahn Books, New York

⁸¹ The realist/materialist conception of earth as sustenance base, sink (or waste disposal organism) and home is drawn from environmental sociology. See: Dunlap, R. & Catton, W. (2002), 'Which functions of the environment do we study? A Comparison of Environmental and Natural Resource Sociology', *Society and Natural Resources*, 15, 239-249

Sustainability and Governance: Lost in Translation

In 1969 the first IUCN⁸² Mandate established foundational architecture about which *sustainability* would be constructed. Engaging with the ‘the perpetuation and enhancement of the living world...and the natural resources on which all living things depend’, the good management of ‘air, water, soils and minerals’ would inform the development of a framework that would ensure that all ‘living species including man (sic) ‘achieve the *highest sustainable quality of life*’⁸³. Here, the inextricable relationship between elements (air, water, soil), species and sustainability underscored the foundational precepts that would steer a way through mounting signs of environmental degradation.

Within three years the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm)⁸⁴ had recalibrated the original game plan. Far more specific about the ways in which planetary life might be sustained, it heralded an era in which *economic growth* and *industrialisation* should proceed without *environmental damage*. Just how this uneasy alliance might be forged was never fully articulated, yet the process of crafting an internationalised response to the pressing challenges that accompanied development proceeded apace. As McCormick⁸⁵ notes, this was a period in which environmental governance had found its place through *damage* and *degradation*, which for the most part registered on the common ground of community life⁸⁶, less so in the urban centres of trade and exchange.

⁸² International Union for the Conservation of Nature

⁸³ Adams, W.M. (2008) *The Future of Sustainability: Re-thinking Environment and Development in the Twenty-First Century* (Report on the Renowned Thinkers Meeting, 29-31 January 2006), IUCN, p.1 emphasis added.

⁸⁴ See: McCormick, J.S. (1992) *The Global Environmental Movement: Reclaiming Paradise*, Belhaven, London

⁸⁵ McCormick, J.S. (1992) *The Global Environmental Movement: Reclaiming Paradise*, Belhaven, London

⁸⁶ Notable is the example of Bhopal. In 1986, Union Carbide’s plant released methyl isocyanate into the air, killing 2,000 people and injuring a further 200,000. As for the rest of Bhopal’s resident species, to say nothing of air and waterways, the disaster resulted not in restoration, compensation or any significant alteration in business practice, rather, it became emblematic of the calculated disdain that came to infuse corporate capital as it proceeded, untrammelled, into new territories. See: Mander, J. (1992) *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations*, The Sierra Club: San Francisco

Two decades later, internationally co-ordinated responses to the impost of development lifted. Where once the central motif of *sustainability* would have occupied the foreground of international governance, the rapid internationalisation of production took matters to the interface of *economic, social and environmental imperatives*. Recast as ‘sustainable development’⁸⁷, this synthesis was set to reframe just what sustainability was, and indeed how it might be operationalized. More recently and usually cast as an oxymoron⁸⁸, the idea of sustainable development has found little purchase, largely because of the paradox it failed to resolve. That is to say, it is inimical to the business internationalised production processes that environmental and social considerations be factored *out* (more usually as externalities⁸⁹), rather than *in*. Given the prominence of climate change as the grand exemplar of this escalation, internationalised striving towards *collective agreements* that addressed these challenges was to find itself largely neutralised.

The evolution of this process rests on two features of international governance. The first centres on the fact that various accords and protocols rely on *agreement*, not *enforcement*⁹⁰. That is, while their scope may be international, it will be to the *national* context that they are consigned for their enactment. Secondly, given that national commitments are (usually) mobilised by *internal* political, economic, cultural and social life, it is the will of various polities to hold their own governments to account, *not the international arena within which negotiations take place*, that actually influences the success or failure of environmental governance arrangements. Given that discrete national forces have been largely excised from international discourse about climate change, the range and extent of various international charters, accords and conventions will, in all likelihood, simply continue to mirror the

⁸⁷ Brundtland, H. (1987) *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, for the World Commission on Environment and Development, p.43

⁸⁸ See: Redclift, M. (2005) ‘Sustainable Development (1987-2005): The coming of age of an oxymoron’, *Sustainable Development* 13: 212-27

⁸⁹ The term ‘externality’ refers explicitly to those elements of any production process that are factored out of the cost of production because they are acquired at no monetary cost to producers. Externalities usually extend to environmental resources such as soil, plants, animals and water, as well as human labour that may be acquired through the exploitation of vulnerable populations such as children. See: Williams, C. (1997), “Environmental victims: Arguing the costs”, *Environmental Values*, 6:3-30.

⁹⁰ Kanie, N (2007) ‘Governance with Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements: A healthy or ill-equipped fragmentation?’ in Walter Hoffmann and Lydia Swart (eds.), *Environmental Governance: Perspectives on the Current Debate*, Center for UN Reform Education Global, New York: pp.67-86

extent and depth of climatic-environmental degradation, rather than address it in any coherent fashion.

Environmental and climatic 'change' now occupy the foreground of international attempts at mitigation-through-consensus, yet it is noteworthy that the parlous state of human rights that similarly unified most nations under discrete conventions and charters, now finds itself all but displaced. Historically, the exhortations of the 1969 IUCN Charter to live sustainably and in harmony so that 'all life' might flourish, ran parallel with subsequent international initiatives that were manifestly concerned with the rights of the child, along with the human impacts of environmental pollution⁹¹ and species endangerment⁹².

These laudable aspirations constituted responses to the internationalisation of capital as it registered in production, consumption, and marketization. Yet paradoxically, the techno-scientific-economic motif that had characterised development within Western liberal democracies generally became a national aspiration in all quarters of the globe and was largely unconstrained in so far as its deleterious effects and impacts were concerned. Indeed, if we add to the current destabilisation of climate the enduring international problems of generalised poverty, human and environmental exploitation, species loss and social dislocation, the developmental stakes not only escalate well beyond national containment lines, they also express distinct complexity, especially with regard to the ways in which less developed countries are now 'steered' through processes of (sustainable economic) development⁹³.

Clearly, the theorizing and discourse that combine to inform international governance have, in their playing out, combined to excise the political-ideological from the frame of reference; the back-story may have been left behind, but the multidimensional effects and impacts remain.

⁹¹ Adams, W. (2001) *Green Development: environment and sustainability in the Third World*, Routledge, London

⁹² International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Chapter 18, 'The global commons', World Conservation Strategy, <http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/WCS-004.pdf>

⁹³ UNFCCC (28 May 2013b), FCCC/SBI/2013/INF.12/Rev.2: Compilation of information on nationally appropriate mitigation actions to be implemented by developing country Parties. <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2013/sbi/eng/inf12r02.pdfpreref=600006173>, Geneva.

In responding to the evolution of these challenges I take up three central considerations. The first concerns *the ways in which sustainability is conceptualized, theorized and situated*. To be clear, the guiding (international) precepts that have thus far steered sustainability are in many respects detached from the ground of their praxis. As a consequence, a second consideration emerges and relates to *the actual, rather than the assumed enactment of sustaining worlds large and small*. That is, the relational dynamic between international environmental governance and its translation on the common ground of local life is poorly configured and variable in its applications. Finally, and often overlooked, is *the creative-imaginal-spiritual dimension of the ways in which we sustain the worlds we occupy*. Here, the moral-ethical and aesthetic values integral to the *practice of sustaining* take their place through heritage, knowledge traditions, and political processes that arise in and beyond communities of place. Since their exclusion would, in my view, constitute an impoverished approach to community sustainability, I incorporate them as an integral feature of this work.

In dealing with these overarching themes, this thesis has been developed in two Parts, with an accompanying Afterword.

Part One constitutes the groundwork that informed the conceptual-theoretical framing of the work. In situating the underlying and extended misreading's of human agency, Chapter One begins with an account of a direct challenge that I faced. In its playing out, the limits of theoretical-conceptual orthodoxy were exchanged for opportunities to cross disciplinary boundaries in the service of a more coherent approach to community sustainability. Thereafter, a more extensive engagement with the historical context within which environmental and social challenges arise charts the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Here the locus of development and its evolution is set beside the impacts that travelled with that transition into the centuries that followed. Subsequently, an elaboration of sustainability in its various formations exposes some of the more specific features of development that led to a reworking of the human-nature association. In particular, dissonant relations between nation, region and community locate the power relations that are, by turns, accommodated and resisted through

various constructions of sustainability. Part One concludes with an interdisciplinary case example that exposes some of challenges that might be met in communities of place. Adopting a more comprehensive approach to sustainability, the mediating influences that impact on local lifeworlds are exposed and addressed.

Part Two constitutes the primary research that informs the thesis. Opening with the conceptual orientation of the work, the Methodology and Methods are articulated. Subsequently, an account of all interviews is presented in text format. In addition, a fuller rendering of communities and individual contributions is presented in DVD format. Part Two proceeds to develop a comprehensive account of Emergent Themes and Research Outcomes. The Conclusion draws together the personal-subjective accounts that inform the primary research and contrasts them with the broader conceptual context that frames a more orthodox reading of sustainability. In situating communities of place within this broader milieu a more critical account of the dialectical relationship between worlds large and small is advanced. In the process, communities of place present their potential as more durable sites for sustainability in practice.

Afterword

Contrasting with the theoretical, conceptual and disciplinary content of the thesis established in Parts One and Two, the Afterword takes up some of the more nuanced features of community sustainability. Returning to the social-material milieu within which ideas, struggles and visions play out, the historical, cultural, political and spiritual dimensions of community life are drawn into the foreground. In the process, the works cited speak to the vast array of forces that sustain us, along with the worlds we value.

Part One: Groundwork

Chapter 1

From the Anthropocene to anthropos seen

One of the most overlooked and yet still critical features of human-induced transformations to planetary systems is the collectively held and tacitly assumed notion of human agency. Even where some account is taken of hegemony, along with relations and distribution of power, the pervasiveness of human agency as an *a priori* condition of planetary occupation arises as a foundational precept that has, especially during the modern period, guided all of our engagements with Earth. Evidenced by the extended development-degradation impasse that now characterises international, national and regional tensions throughout the world, human agency constitutes the foundational precept for any broadly agreed upon attempts at mitigation. Even where various agencies of the United Nations attempt to hold signatories to the tenets of those conventions, and accounting for the relative authority of UN agencies to develop endangerment listings with regard to 'natural environments', *the human* prevails. By inference, then, human agency implies the capacity to act – to make decisions and judgements; to respond, to enforce, to dispatch. Indeed, it might be said that the elevated place of human agency is now so deeply embedded in the species DNA that any notion of 'other' agency can be dispatched in the same breath that hints at its presence.

Yes, of course humans have agency. By definition, the species is a sentient actor capable of ordering the various worlds it encounters. Indeed, if (human) evolution is to retain its deep meaning then science, technology and development stand as its exemplars, the combined affects of which now assert themselves in a new epoch: The Age of the Anthropocene. Succeeding the Pleistocene – that period in which *homo sapiens* begins its ascent some 200,000 years ago – the Anthropocene now constitutes a clear register of species domination - or so the story goes...

Yet look again, and behind the tacitly assumed place of human agency there lurks its slowly rising nemesis. Lying as if in wait, the dark-form of *delusion* prepares to assert itself. Shadow-like and fused to the form of its original emergence, human agency now prepares to meet the limits of its own making.

Setting the scene of this meeting, Bruno Latour links the limiting assumptions that carried human-centred agency during the medieval period with their transformation into equally limiting contemporary manifestations. Aptly titled, *Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene*⁹⁴ the author sets forth on a journey that navigates the natural-physical sciences through their various iterations. From Copernicus to Galileo we initially encounter what I will characterise as *pre-Science*. Caught in the grip of culturally grounded religious imperatives, Inquisitorial tenets challenged even the most eminently 'objective facts'. For Galileo in particular, adopting the science and principles of the Copernican system that held the Earth to be orbiting the Sun meant the commission of an offence. Notably, one that offended the sacralized position of 'man' in the cosmos. Invested with *belief*, rather than reason, the orthodoxy of the time held that Earth lay at the heart of a geocentric universe; as such it constituted the penultimate register of God's anthropocentric dominion. As Latour notes:

...after having been forbidden by the Holy Inquisition to teach anything publically about the movement of the Earth, Galileo is supposed to have mumbled "*and yet it moves.*" This episode is...the first trial: a "prophetic" scientist pitted against all the authorities of the time, stating silently the objective fact that will later destroy these authorities.⁹⁵

As the story plays out, the scientific revolution that followed in the wake of the European Inquisition held at its core the binary of subject and object. Leading the world away from the supernatural and into the domain of the rational, the ground of Church and Science was to become delineated, to the point where something of a separation of powers was established. Here the Church sanctified the agency of a God that promised salvation in the afterlife, while Science legitimized the objective reason that was to undergird its evolution in the immanent domain of this one.

In crafting the narrative of human progress Latour revisits current debates and discourse about climate change, replete with naysayers and skeptics. Here the resonance of the original contest between Church and Science emerges as a motif that has morphed into a more pressing battle. Alluding to both the real and symbolic significance of the Inquisition as a force deployed to silence the enlightened, he centres on the paradoxical and contemporary

⁹⁴ Latour, B. (2014), 'Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene', *New Literary History*, Vol. 45, No. 1, Winter, pp. 1-18

⁹⁵ Op. cit., p. 4

reproduction of denial that once characterized the medieval Church's dispatch of 'objective fact'. He cautions:

But now...we are witnessing a second trial: in front of all the assembled powers, another scientist - or rather an assembly of equally "prophetic" scientists - is condemned to remain silent by all those who are in denial about the behavior of the Earth, and he mumbles the same "*Eppur si muove*" by giving it a different and rather terrifying new spin: "and *yet the Earth* is moved." (The French is even more telling: "*Et pourtant la Terre se meut*" versus "*et pourtant la Terre s'émeut*"!)⁹⁶.

For Galileo, the Earth moved about the Sun. Supported by the invention of the telescope this was an objective fact distanced from the ground on which it was observed. Yet now, in the contemporary context of those same 'facts', the warrant of distance, and indeed, 'objectivity', is less secure. Where once subject and object could be as clearly delineated as Church and Science, binaries and divisions now evaporate. No longer value-neutral, less secure in the distantiated relations between the 'objects' of science, the Earth itself challenges the original claims of Galileo's science. As Latour puts it:

The European prescientific vision of the Earth saw it as a cesspool of decay, death, and corruption from which our ancestors, their eyes fixed toward the incorruptible spheres of suns, stars, and God, had a tiny chance of escaping solely through prayer, contemplation, and knowledge; today, in a sort of counter-Copernican revolution, it is science that is forcing our eyes to turn toward the Earth considered, once again, as a cesspool of conflict, decay, war, pollution, and corruption. This time, however, there is no prayer, and no chance of escaping to anywhere else. After having moved from the closed cosmos to the infinite universe, we have to move back from the infinite universe to the closed cosmos - except this time there is no order, no God, no hierarchy, no authority, and thus literally no "cosmos," a word that means a handsome and *well-composed* arrangement. Let's give this new situation its Greek name, *kakosmos*. What a drama we have been through: from cosmos to the universe and then, from the universe to the *kakosmos*!⁹⁷.

Central to Latour's extensive coverage is the notion of agency. Implicitly he begs the question: What is it and who has it? In response he asserts that the objective realm of science that separated subject and object in order to differentiate between 'fact' and opinion, must now confront the 'object' known as Earth and meet its various qualities.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 2

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 4

Far from being a 'thing' that is acted upon, it now registers its presence as a subject with agency.

We all agree that, far from being a Galilean body stripped of any other movements than those of billiard balls, the Earth has now taken back all the characteristics of a full-fledged *actor*. Indeed, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has proposed, it has become once again an *agent of history*, or rather, an agent of what I have proposed to call our common *geostory*...

If the Inquisition was shocked at the news that the Earth was nothing more than a billiard ball spinning endlessly in the vast universe...the new Inquisition (now economic rather than religious) is shocked to learn that the Earth has become - has become again! - an active, local, limited, sensitive, fragile, quaking, and easily tickled envelope⁹⁸.

In dealing more explicitly with the contemporary challenges that come with Earth-as-subject Latour notes that those prescientific, non-modern myths, hitherto dispatched to the past, have reasserted their presence. That is, in a once archaic space an agent had ascribed to it '...the qualities of "subject" because he or she might be *subjected* to the vagaries, bad humor, emotions, reactions, and even revenge of another agent, who also gains its quality of "subject" because it is also *subjected* to his or her action. The subject does not act autonomously against an objective background, but rather, *shares agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy*'⁹⁹.

Now move forward in time, to a space in which post-millennial humanity is left to confront those same subjects, and any hope or dream of mastery falls away. Indeed, and despite the best that science can throw up '...the Earth is no longer "objective"; it cannot be put at a distance and emptied of all its humans. Human action is visible everywhere - in the construction of knowledge *as well as* in the production of the phenomena (the) sciences are called to register'¹⁰⁰. And if, as Latour would have it, all agents living in the epoch of the Anthropocene 'share the same shape-changing destiny', then it also holds true that the characterization 'object' and 'subject' is surely extinguished by an emergent agency, distributed and differentiated to the extent that such binaries 'are no longer of any interest any more except in a patrimonial sense'¹⁰¹.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 3

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 5

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 5

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 15

While much of Latour's coverage leverages the generalizable features of contemporary challenges to planetary life in order to draw our attention, I turn to a less obvious implication in his argument. In particular, the dispatch of binaries such as subject and object, and the repositioning of agency as a condition shared by multiple and de-centred subjects does, in and of itself, draw the eye to a less abstract domain. That is, the places and spaces that constitute the ground of day to day life – not merely of human beings, but of all that pervades the physical and social environment. Indeed, if we are to accept that agency at the time of the Anthropocene is being recalibrated to accommodate a subject-centred planet animated by all it hosts, then can we not also accept that the spaces in which decentred subjects live out their connections is a worthy entry point for a re-meeting with that world - one in which the abstract Anthropocene is reconfigured to reveal the anthropic 'atoms' that constitute its very being? More to the point, perhaps, might not that re-meeting tell us more about the ways in which multiple actors are crafting the story of a world in transition?

My own contention is probably obvious: yes, let's look to the ground – and the seas, and the sky. Let's move into place and space and home - mine, yours, theirs and ours. If we are pervasively challenged by the generalizable degradation of the planet, then might there something to be learned in those spaces where the disconnect between you and me, 'this' and 'that' is less abstract and more immanent?

The Call to Re-Search

In grounding the challenge that this work takes up I begin with the title that guided it: *Intending Community: Space, Place, Home - Unearthing sustainability at the margins*. Here my own active intention was to search out the ways in which individuals and communities mobilized around the idea of sustainability, and indeed, the various constructions that they applied to it. In relation to those lifeworlds, I also carried an acknowledgement that localities, along with 'the locals' who reside therein, contain a complex of interacting agents. Yes, human beings centre the work; implicit in any social research is a direct engagement with people. Yet, if work of this nature is to have any grounded meaning, human agents must be situated in and amidst the multiple connections and relations that play out in physical-natural environments.

By implication, then, this work is ontological in its orientation. Accordingly, the original intention to deploy an ethnographic approach captured both the need for direct engagement within local communities, as well as the performative¹⁰² framing that would be applied to the research process itself. That is, I would look to the relationship between understandings of reality and the ways in which it is performed, or enacted, whilst resident in those communities.

Mindful of the potential impacts that research of this kind can have, I adopted a reflexive position. According to Willis¹⁰³, our researches, along with the various worlds in which we conduct them, are inextricably linked. Individually and collectively we bring our own expressions of reality into being and the ways in which we frame our research also has an ontological character – we do not simply describe the world as we apprehend it, we enter into processes that help define and create it. So, just as the worlds that we

¹⁰² See: Roberts, B., (2008) 'Performative Social Science: A Consideration of Skills, Purpose and Context', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (FQS), Vol. 9, No. 2, Art. 58, May; Denzin, N.K. (2001) 'The reflexive interview and a performative social science', *Qualitative Research*, No.1, pp. 23-46

¹⁰³ For a more comprehensive discussion of reflexivity see: Willis, K. (2010) 'Creating Meaning: The vital ingredients', in Walter, M. (ed.), (2010) *Social Research Methods*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, pp. 409-414

research are brought into being by various aspects of reality making down on the ground, so too the sciences that attempt to capture them¹⁰⁴.

Sustainability, whatever its construction, is a pervasive signifier that has an established place in both discourse and debate about the impacts of development. The ways in which it is enacted, or performed, are various, disparate and sometimes at odds with each other. Given that it would be at the community level that the vast majority of adverse developmental impacts would be felt, I initially looked to those citizen driven initiatives that could be said to be local, or community-based. In particular, I was engaged by the ways in which communities attempted to meet their variously perceived challenges.

In preparing to meet community life, along with the ways in which sustainability figures in the local landscape, I was initially drawn to the place of belief, values and intentions as they combine to produce identifiable actions and results in the local world of villages, towns and suburbs. At the outset I was drawn to a recent social movement that had started to respond to the larger challenges that governments were failing to address – the Transition Towns Movement¹⁰⁵. Additionally, I looked to the more enduring intentional communities of Findhorn and Iona in Scotland, which, despite their characteristic differences, had not only endured for some decades, but had modelled their processes through various initiatives and engagements beyond their own borders. In all cases I intended to engage ordinary individuals involved in these initiatives, largely because I saw a potential value in portraying the ways in which individuals establish and occupy a coherent collectivity in meeting significant social and environmental challenges.

In the case of the Transition Towns Movement I encountered a clearly identifiable expression of community mobilization around sustainability. Its own unfolding also suited the project that lay ahead of me. That is to say, it was a community-based initiative that had sprouted organically out of local

¹⁰⁴ Law, J. & Urry, J. (2004) 'Enacting the Social', *Economy and Society*, Vol. 33, No.3 pp 390-410

¹⁰⁵ *Transition Towns*, (2009)

<<<http://www.transitionnetwork.org/Strategy/TransitionNetworkWhoWeAreWhatWeDo.pdf>>>.

concerns and realizations about the impacts of development – in this case, the use and hazards that come with fossil fuels.

The history of the Transition Towns movement is fresh and recent, and the movement is still navigating some of the challenges that come with citizen mobilization. Its humble beginnings happened in 2005 in the township of Kinsale, Ireland. With a resident population of 2,300 the town engaged in a process that was to shape and inform a new social movement that would cross many national borders within the ensuing years. The initiative started with an Energy Descent Action Plan¹⁰⁶ – a process that embodied a collective push to move from high consumption of oil to low consumption. This was in response to the challenge of ‘peak oil’ – an immanent challenge that reportedly heralded a peak in petroleum production by 2015, with a steady 4%-7% decline thereafter. Steered by Rob Hopkins, the EDAP (Energy Descent Action Plan) was developed by permaculture students of Kinsale Further Education College. It sought to establish a clear and achievable vision of a lower energy future, as well as a timetable for achieving it. Reviewing most aspects of community life in Kinsale, the EDAP included food production, tourism, education and health, ultimately establishing a blueprint for other towns and villages that wanted to transition towards a lower energy future. It is perhaps testament to the value of community participation and engagement that the Kinsale Energy Descent Action Plan was awarded the Cork Environmental Forum’s 2005 Roll of Honour Award, and importantly, that it was formally adopted by a unanimous vote of Kinsale’s town council at the end of 2005.

Building on the success of Kinsale, Hopkins engaged the township of Totnes – population 8,500 - in a process that would see it named the first Transition Town in the UK¹⁰⁷. Project start happened late in 2005 with an intensive programme of community engagement - meetings, film screenings, keynote speakers and presentations. By September 2006 the official launch of Transition Town Totnes (TTT) took place. Attended by 350 people, the town

¹⁰⁶ See: ‘Kinsale 2021: An Energy Descent Action Plan 2005’

<http://transitionculture.org/wp-content/uploads/members/KinsaleEnergyDescentActionPlan.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ See: <http://transitiontowns.org/TransitionNetwork#primer>

moved into a process of ever growing engagement as it transitioned away from high reliance on non-renewable energies. Since that time its success has expanded and it is now a broadly inclusive initiative supported by the whole township.

During the last eight or nine years the movement has flourished and today there are more than 250 Transition Towns across the globe, most supported by websites. There is a Transition Towns primer that provides a coherent start-up pack for interested groups and communities. There are strategies, events, and collective support processes as people come together to deal with the pressing realities of peak oil, environmental degradation and the imperative of food security.

In late 2009 I contacted a newly established Transition Town in the region where I lived: Transition Bell¹⁰⁸. A suburb of Geelong (in Victoria, Australia) the area was settled by Polish migrants in the 1960's and 70's, many of whom found long term employment in the now defunct local Ford plant. Now ageing, the original Polish migrants have a strong presence in the local landscape, as does the growing number of Australian residents.

Transition Bell was just finding its feet when I met its co-ordinator, who brought considerable experience in environmental management to the new venture. Watched from a distance by the considerably older Polish residents the Transition Towners mobilised. Permaculture days brought the new band together to develop vegie gardens in front yards, free ranging chook runs, car pooling, along with do-it-yourself wine and beer brewing, soap making, as well as solar energy production and grey water harvesting. Solar panels appeared on many of the local homes and were something of a curiosity for the older folk – they looked *odd*. Vegetables growing in front yards elicited a similar response, until they were offered over fences as the exchanges became more open.

¹⁰⁸ See: Transition Bell <http://transitionbell.collectivex.com/main/summary>

Due in large part to the fact that there were no serious tensions between the different cultural groups, the relationship between the Transition Town members and their Polish observers grew into a more enduring feature of life in the suburb. There were music nights at the local Polish church where, once invited, food sharing, followed by 'cooking lessons for the young boys', became a regular feature of local interactions between the two groups. All in all, Transition Bell stood out as a beacon to other localities where people wanted to know how to mobilise. In fact, so successful had the initiative become that it was visited by groups from as far afield as the Yarra Valley (three hours north-east by train).

Contrasted with the TT movement were the two intentional communities that I also intended to engage. In each case these communities were long standing and have navigated their own internal challenges. Both are located in Scotland and both are 'open' in that they invite engagement. Like the TT movement each of these communities is guided by a collective will to enhance the relationships we develop with the world, yet each expresses a range of differences from the other.

The first, Iona, is a small island in the Inner Hebrides that lies off the west coast of Scotland. As noted earlier, the Reverend George MacLeod was largely responsible for the development of the intentional community of Iona, which continues to flourish through a range of social initiatives including Youth Work at the Camas Centre (on the neighbouring island of Mull), Publishing, Social Justice initiatives, World Peace activities and Pastoral Care. Located within the broader island community it maintains an ecumenical character that underscores both its intentionality and its sustainability. With a full membership of 350 people and 1500 associates, the community also supports some 130 voluntary staff as well as a resident group of paid staff. The island's headquarters are located in Glasgow, where a co-ordinated range of activities and initiatives support it¹⁰⁹.

Findhorn, the second intentional community, though dispersed according to its various activities and interests, is located primarily in the small township

¹⁰⁹ See: Iona Community <<http://www.iona.org.uk/>>

of Forres in northeast Scotland. It has a static community population of some 450 residents and was established in November 1962 by Eileen Caddy, with the support of Peter Caddy and Dorothy Maclean. Like Iona, Findhorn transformed from a base-camp home to these three people and their children, largely through the efforts of Eileen Caddy who was very much driven to make her home in ways compatible with the broader natural environment. As a spiritualist she also carried a set of deep beliefs and values into a process that began as a humble attempt at communalism. Yet like George MacLeod she probably had no clear vision of the transformations that would follow.

With an unbroken continuity since its inception Findhorn has developed a range of sustainable initiatives that impact well beyond its borders¹¹⁰. By way of example, these include the Findhorn Foundation, an educational charity that runs coursework and workshops and owns Cluny Hill College; the Findhorn Foundation College, which operates tertiary education programs from Cluny Hill College in the town of Forres; Windpark (electricity generation); Earthshare, an organic agricultural co-operative; Living Technologies, an organization that builds ecological sewage treatment plants and reed beds and restores lakes.

One of the underlying reasons for choosing to engage with each of these initiatives stemmed from my own interest in communities that can endure the ravages of change (internal and external) yet emerge robust and unguarded about the business with which they are engaged. Of equal importance was the fact that they had not sought or relied upon state sponsorship. That is to say, each of the communities developed the ways and means by which a future could be envisioned and secured. The same could be said to hold true for the Transition Towns.

The process of engaged research with these communities was moving along well when an unanticipated challenge emerged. Well met through Lionel, introduced in the Prelude to this work, was an inescapable confrontation with my own views and values and their place in the work that I was doing. In a

¹¹⁰ See: Findhorn Foundation for an extensive account of current sustainability initiatives <http://www.findhorn.org/whatwedo/ecovillage/un_history.php>

nutshell, he could see some value in initiatives like the Transition Towns Movement, but he saw a broader issue, which centred on the fact that most people weren't organised into groups, and it was unlikely that they ever would be. Apart from that, "lots of people can't join these groups...they're too old, or crook¹¹¹...and maybe some of them don't want to join things...that doesn't mean they're not doing anything worthwhile..."

As he put it, "...seems to me we need to know what's happening out there, and we don't...who knows, maybe there's things to be learned there too."

Over the course of the next few weeks I was left to confront my initial concerns about the fragmentary nature of social research. Neat specializations and delineations had been a distinct feature of a research culture that I had often resisted. In the context of the work I was currently engaged in this meant that while I could acknowledge the value of some of the citizen movements that took up the environmental gauntlet, I was also aware that they so often reproduced their own specializations and fields of endeavour. Just as importantly, many foundered along the way and continuity was lost. This was brought into sharp relief when I gave due consideration to the fact that the members of the Transition Towns Movement and the intentional communities represented collectives that had established their respective initiatives on the basis of *agreed-upon values within prescribed parameters*. While individuals within those communities may well hold diverse views about sustainability, a more pressing consideration was the fact that the research as it was originally intended may well exclude the very range of ideas, views, beliefs and actions that I had hoped would draw me closer to a deeper rendering of sustainability. More to the point, my meeting with Lionel had reinforced the fact that we would never know sustainability's more discrete meanings if we failed to ask questions about its place in the lives of individuals. Indeed, as his 'gems' and observations replayed themselves what struck me, and what ultimately forced a significant shift in the way I would meet community, was Lionel's belonging to it. That is, everything mattered and nothing was left out. People mattered as much as pelicans and tea trees. This was a world in which 'this' and 'that' enjoyed equivalence through relationship. There was knowledge here – knowledge through connection.

¹¹¹ In the vernacular: unwell, or living with physical health challenges.

And there was an emotional, psychic, aesthetic at work - an appreciation, a welcoming, a concern. More to the point, there was no external, guiding precept upon which Lionel would meet the world; he acted on the basis of his own, personal connections to place, in contrast to collectively constructed agreements about that place. Indeed, as I got to know Lionel I also met the synchronised rhythms that he had developed with everything else that occupied his home.

Ultimately I was left with a knot that had to be untangled: a reflexive ethnography would draw *anthropos* and *ethnos* into such close association that any rendering of sustainability would necessarily be infused with the human as an *a priori condition of the research*. By one remove, the cultural (rendered through views and values about sustainability) would (probably) be drawn into the foreground at the expense of 'the rest': topographies, geologies, waterways, seas and species, which would be filtered accordingly, only finding a place through identification and delineation at the hands of individuals who held their place within groups. The risk here was clear: partialities and separations were more likely to prevail over unification, connection and communion. By implication, the elevation of *human* agency would remain.

Developing a Communography

In navigating a way forward I initially considered alternative research methods, particularly those that have developed in various and relevant sub-disciplines, yet the same challenges were equally evident¹¹². In resolving the dilemma I chose a simple path: to leave the idea of ethnography behind and take up the challenge of reconfiguring the research in a manner that would ensure a broader capture of complexity. To that end, the communography began its slow emergence. While its development receives more conceptual-methodological attention in Part Two, Chapter 5, a word of clarification is necessary before proceeding.

¹¹² A more comprehensive account of the alternative methodologies that I considered is developed in Part Two: Introduction

As occasionally happens in circumstances where some elements of orthodoxy are set aside, there will sometimes be a need to reassess the terminology that we apply. In my case, the motivation to develop an accurately named characterisation of the work led to the development of the term communography. Suggestive of a broader communion, the communography would not exclude the human, but neither would it bestow privilege. Rather, it would demand a conceptual frame that could extend notions of agency well beyond the human. My hope here was that a more nuanced rendering of sustainability would unfold, one replete with the substantive presence of environments, topographies, species, artefacts and aesthetics.

Because I had not previously encountered the term an extensive search revealed that it had no disciplinary pedigree, but was deployed by L.L. Bernard¹¹³ in a journal article written in 1928. Entitled 'Communography, Communometry, Communology' the review article traverses several works concerned with community life and opens with some salutary remarks about the ways in which the sociological orthodoxy of the time had asserted its place and presence. In referencing each of the works under review Bernard sets both the scene and the tone:

Not so long ago it was society, then it was the group, now it is the community which holds our attention in sociology. Allport has rediscovered the individual, after the sociologists had buried him alive in the social process of Small, and the neo-Hegelians had lost him in "culture", and McDougall and the biologists had forced him to retire into the anonymity of "race". All of which perhaps means that we are about to achieve a cycle, as Vico would have said, and start our sociology again on a new level. *In the new sociology the individual is not neglected, nor is social environment – which some of the erstwhile instinctivists find it more agreeable to call "culture" – but the individual and the environment appear as functions of each other, each conditioning the other. In this way we have achieved an equilibrium as an escape from the earlier chaos and recrimination in which some of our more confused brethren partially lost their sociological balance.*¹¹⁴

[Empasis added]

In so far as L.L. Bernard's own endeavours are concerned, he is credited (at the time of publication) with a collection of life histories of the founders of

¹¹³ Bernard, L.L. (1928), 'Communography, Communometry, Communology' *Social Forces*, VII: 153-56. September.

¹¹⁴ Bernard, L.L. (1928), 'Communography, Communometry, Communology' *Social Forces*, VII, p. 153

sociology in the USA¹¹⁵, together with a range of other articles¹¹⁶, and it seems clear that he was engaged by the prospect of resituating people and place in a more unified manner than had hitherto been the case. While there are no clear defining characteristics attributed to the term communography in his article, the resonance of his engagement reverberates well beyond its original formulation. For that reason, and given my wish to deploy an accurate naming of the work that I was about to embark on, I set about developing a conceptual framework, along with methodology and methods, that would support the communography. In acknowledging that the communography as it is developed here is of my own making, I must also acknowledge that any limiting features that it may carry are not attributable to L.L. Bernard.

In more specific terms, and given the extent of the ground I wanted to cover, the communographic approach would demand a fuller reading of the sciences, philosophies, theologies and theosophies that informed the various meanings that we ascribe to both 'community' and 'sustainability'. Similarly, it would demand an engagement with the fictional and imaginal, since they too shape our ways of apprehending and living in the world, of the aesthetic that infuses our values with meaning. There would be histories, ecologies and geologies here – none discarded for the want of orthodoxy. Importantly, the research process itself would need to be as broadly informed as possible in order to facilitate meaningful dialogue with the people that I might encounter and the environments that I would traverse. In short, I would need to ensure that I was well enough informed to actually *hear and see* the diversity of views and values and *understand* the activities that engaged individuals.

In so far as the non-human is concerned, a significant consideration was the way in which I might represent and include physical environments and

¹¹⁵ *An Autobiographical History of Sociology in the United States* (no publication details available)

¹¹⁶ "Communography, Communometry, Communology", *Social Forces*, V II: 153-56. Sept., 1928.

"The Negro in Relation to Other Races in Latin America" (with J.S Bernard) *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, November, 1928.

"Some Historical and Recent Trends of Sociology in the United States", *Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly*, December 1928

"La Situación Política en los Estados Unidos", *Nosotros* (Buenos Ayres), Año XXIII, Mayo, 1929.

"Introduction to Papers on Human Ecology and Population", *Publications of the American Sociological Society*, 1928 (Vol. XXIII, published 1929)

multiple species. In effect, I wanted to situate the human and non-human as *part of* the same domain, not as discrete features consigned to separate categories. Just as I would be speaking with people, recording interviews and engaging in a dialogic process, I wanted to find a way to represent environments and species. The challenge was an obvious one - as one wit put it: "What, you going to interview crows as well?!"

In response to this implicit challenge I elected to develop a digital text to accompany the written form of the thesis. My intention was to render the totality of community life – from people to built and natural environments, multiple species and so on. Within this frame, the inescapable presence of 'the other' could be incorporated. As noted earlier, the idea of agency usually implies *the human*, which overlooks the degree to which the *non-human* is an actant in the process of sustaining any aspect of the lifeworld. An additional benefit in adopting this approach was that interviews with people could be matched to the substance of interviews – whether about built or natural environments, local initiatives, other species and so on.

In recasting the work so significantly, I also decided to let go of Transition Bell as a research site. As it happened, this coincided with some difficulties that had begun to surface with the Movement generally¹¹⁷. Concerns about the level of inclusivity had been raised at its 2009 Conference. In particular, and following some of its own research¹¹⁸, 95% of members surveyed identified as European, with 85% being educated to post-graduate degree level. By contrast, low income and minority (ethnic) groups were very much underrepresented. Some of the members of Transition Bell were well aware of these emerging challenges and so became progressively more guarded about any external research. As a consequence, my decision to withdraw was without incident, and irrespective of the fact that I wanted to reframe the primary research, any new community-based initiative needs time to flex

¹¹⁷ For a response to a critique of the Transition Towns Movement, along with a response by Rob Hoskins see: <http://transitionculture.org/2009/11/03/responding-to-alex-steffens-critique-of-transition-at-worldchanging/>

¹¹⁸ The Transition Network Diversity Project (2009) conducted research into membership characteristics, resulting in some challenging findings, which informed its response. See, Smith, A. (2011) 'The Transition Town Network: A Review of Current Evolutions and Renaissance', *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, 10:01, pp. 99-105

through the early days of it challenges without the scrutiny of an outsider. That said, I did keep in touch with some of the members informally and acknowledge their collective capacity to grow and engage.

In the case of Findhorn I encountered no resistance as such, but rather a cautionary tale that posed some of the less well-canvassed political and representational elements of social research, particularly the portrayal of community life by outsiders. In a review of the need for communities and academics to reset the ways in which primary research is conducted, Peter Forster, one-time resident of Findhorn, outlines some of the pitfalls and challenges that are brought into play in the service of developing a better dialogue between the two. While the article is instructive, less overtly it signals the degree to which Findhorn has been researched. Once again, my own decision to reorientate the primary research coincided with the need to avoid working in communities with a 'research history'.

As a consequence of these developments I made two decisions with regard to prospective research sites. In the first instance I resolved to look the community of St. Leonards. The underlying reason for choosing my own hometown is attributable not just to my encounter with Lionel, but just as importantly, to the fact that we are often reluctant to face what is immediately before us because it is not distanced enough to enjoy the warrant of detachment. Implicitly, this lack of will to face the familiar, does, in its way, impugn the research through avoidance. Yet having already resolved to dispense with the limiting features of social research orthodoxy, and having set aside my own attachment to ethnography, I saw some value in starting with *what I thought I knew* about 'home' and pressing on to navigate its character – replete with surprises.

With regard to Iona I opted to include it in the research process, largely because it represented a quite different challenge to the business of community sustainability. In particular, Iona was a community that I had come to know through secondary research and one chance meeting with someone who had worked in the intentional community for a brief period during the 1980s. The (intentional) Iona Community is ecumenical and not

necessarily as engaged with the more usual sustainability practices, yet I saw the place of religion and spirituality as important, particularly as they drew upon the role of meaning and values in sustaining the life of the intentional community. To contemplate meaning within a secular context alone would limit the research in precisely the same way as the orthodoxy that challenged me to change my perspective in the first place. Quite apart from that, I intuitively saw some prospect of discovering not just the intentional community of Iona, but just as importantly, others that may have been constituted by different histories and settlement patterns. In short, I expected that I would find more than one community on this small island and was drawn to the fact that there may be other issues regarding sustainability and relationships that could inform the research.

In preparing to meet the various communities that I would engage with there was a clear need to establish a conceptual-methodological framework that responded to the more inclusive rendering of community that I had chosen. That is, when community is recast as both social (human) and material (physical environments) a compelling imperative arises to move beyond the limits of disciplinary conventions that privilege the one over the other. While the social sciences carry a rich stream of theoretical, conceptual and methodological relevance into the domain of the human, they are, nonetheless, so often limited by their own contextual settings. In effect, the call to a broader engagement demanded the significant addition of not only a range of physical sciences, but also, and just as importantly, their philosophical dimension.

Here I was particularly concerned to draw on a range of scholarship that had crossed borders and boundaries in a bid to enliven the limited world of our orthodox sciences - social and other¹¹⁹. Quite apart from the obvious value of adding to, rather than subtracting from notions of community, the repertoire of this emergent science and its attendant philosophies led to explorations that opened spaces in which individual community participants might be

¹¹⁹ See: Stengers, I. (2005) 'An ecology of practices', *Cultural Studies Review*, Vol.11 (1): 183-196; Stengers, I. (2012) 'Reclaiming Animism', *e-flux journal*, No. 36, July; Liu, J., et al (2007) 'Complexity of Coupled Human and Natural Systems', *Science*, Vol. 317, pp. 1513-1516.

better heard as they articulated the rich diversity of their views, values and engagements with sustainability. Similarly, the environs more usually detached from the social could be resituated in an equivalent space beside, not apart from, the human.

Clearly, the conceptual-theoretical character of the communography needed to be established in such a way that human beings and physical environments could be cast in relation, rather than separation. Here a coherent set of guiding principles was required, as would be the case for any other methodology. In turning to this aspect of the research framework, Chapter Two provides a review of the key theorists whose expanded vision supported this process.

Chapter 2

Conceptual-Theoretical Framing

In developing a conceptual-theoretical framework to support the communography I looked to scholars whose work would contribute to the development of a far more inclusive and open construction of what community is and of how it behaves. Initially I drew significantly upon the work of Isabelle Stengers¹²⁰ and more particularly, on her own variant of constructivism¹²¹. Whereas the more orthodox version of constructivism within the social sciences centralises the human-social construction of reality, Stengers asserts *the exchange* between human-social and natural and attributes to each discrete, interactive force the capacity of construction. Just as the human species constructs and attributes meaning within its various milieux of operation, so too the other-than-human. Within this space, the extent and range of agency is similarly attributable to the degrees of influence and interaction that pertain to each agent. While the idea of construction is not excised from the social, nor indeed, diminished as a result of the extent of social impacts on 'natural' worlds, human provenance cannot automatically be asserted or assumed. For Stengers, the idea that *the social* and *parts of the material* world are constructed by human beings is counterbalanced by the place of the other-than-human, which similarly asserts its capacity to construct (and modify) worlds familiar to the human domain. Here we are led to an appreciation of processes in which interactive transformations constitute a multivalent flow, as opposed to the one-way drift that carries the human-social to a peak of influence.

One of the more critical features of Stenger's work resides in a rich exploration of Alfred North Whitehead¹²². In particular, her coverage of Whitehead's ongoing engagement with process philosophy¹²³ and the limits

¹²⁰ Stengers, I. (2005) 'An ecology of practices', *Cultural Studies Review*, Vol.11 (1): 183-196;

Stengers, I. (2000) *The Invention of Modern Science*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis

¹²¹ Stengers, I. (2008) 'A Constructivist Reading of Process and Reality', *Theory, Culture, Society*, Vol. 25(4): 91-110

¹²² See: Stengers, I (2011) *Thinking with Whitehead: A free and wild creation of concepts*, Harvard University Press (This work constitutes a translation of the original 2002 work)

¹²³ Whitehead, A.N. (1979) *Process and Reality: An essay in Cosmology*, Free Press
This edition: Griffin, D.R. and Sherburne, D.W. (eds). Also see corrections and final interpretation at:

http://www.forizslaszlo.com/filozofia/folyamat_es_valosag/Whitehead_PR_Part5_Final_Interpretation.pdf.

of modernist science. Central to Whitehead's exposition is the way in which the moderns delineated their various spheres of investigation, influence and experimentation. Whitehead did not excise from his project the importance of empiricism *per se*, yet he was nonetheless concerned to reset the nature of that empiricism. That is, the precise conditions under which science framed its investigations were crafted to ensure the secure containment of its expertise. This process, along with the value frames that supported it, finds its best expression in the 'bifurcation of nature'¹²⁴. Here, Whitehead called into question the classification of primary and secondary qualities of nature that characterised so much of the modernist project. The underlying philosophy of this post-medieval science presumed and theorized the bifurcation of nature by asserting the existence of two sets of 'things'. To the first set was attributed primary qualities: as long as a 'thing' or 'substance' could be said to be composed of the fundamental constituents of the universe (invisible to the naked eye, yet *known and knowable* to science) it could be said to be *real* and *valueless*. On the other hand, the secondary set of things were said to be those that were constituted out of what the mind (human mind, that is) *adds* to the basic building blocks of the world in order to make sense of them. Whitehead identified the latter and secondary category as 'psychic additions' that were deemed to be of no use to science precisely because they had no 'reality' (despite the fact that they underscored values and intentions)¹²⁵ – hence their secondary status.

Whitehead did not support or share this thesis and his own explorations avoided the more usual practice of critique as a way to reinstate the value of substance *and* organism, or primary and secondary qualities. For him, the 'substance' of science and the 'organism' of metaphysics were fused. That is, the *substantive organism* always endured, in whatever guise.

Taking up Whitehead's extensive coverage of this critical assemblage of science and philosophy Stengers allows herself to be led into and through modernist science, its accompanying philosophical underpinnings and onto a metaphysics that refused the bifurcation of nature.

¹²⁴ In: Latour, B. (2005) 'What Is Given In Experience', *Boundary 2*, 32, p. 226

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 227

In a review of her work, Bruno Latour recounts what I would characterise as Stengers' critical contemplation of Whitehead's creative recalcitrance:

...modernist philosophy of science implies a bifurcation of nature into objects having primary and secondary qualities. However, if nature really is bifurcated, no living organism would be possible, since being an organism means being the sort of thing whose primary and secondary qualities – if they did exist – are essentially blurred. Since we are organisms surrounded by many other organisms, nature has *not* bifurcated. Corollary: if nature has never bifurcated in the way philosophy has implied since the time of Locke, what sort of metaphysics should be devised that would pay full justice to the concrete and obstinate existence of organisms? The consequence of considering this question is radical indeed: "The question of what is an object, and thus what is an abstraction must belong, if nature is not allowed to bifurcate, to *nature* and not to knowledge only"¹²⁶.

Needless to say, and in relation to the focus of this work, some appreciation of the extent to which the scientific-philosophical 'splitting' (bifurcation) of nature has become an embedded distortion is warranted, especially because it mediates our collective efforts to respond to the whole-of-planet challenges that now confront all species (human included). This is particularly so when we consider that despite its temporal distance, the new scientific method that carried Descartes, Newton and Bacon into the foreground of public life in the seventeenth century, resonates still. Indeed, Bacon's *New Atlantis*, published in 1605, aligns neatly with much of contemporary science *and* reason and could be applied equally to genetic engineering, gene patenting, animal husbandry and slaughtering practices, along with testing regimes and animal trials that take the sting out of new drugs, cosmetics and surgical procedures where the endpoint consumer will be a human being.

Consider Bacon's vision:

...parks and inclosures of all sorts of beast and birds, which we use not only for view or rareness, but likewise for dissections and trials; that thereby we may take light what may be wrought upon the body of man...We try also all poisons and other medicines upon them, as well of chirurgery [vivisection] as physic. By art likewise, we make them greater or taller than their kind is; and contrariwise dwarf them and stay their growth: we make them more fruitful and bearing than their kind is; and contrariwise barren and not generative...We make them also by art greater much than their nature...¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Latour, B. (2005), 'What Is Given In Experience', *Boundary 2*, 32, p. 227

¹²⁷ Cited in McIntosh, A. (2004) *Soil And Soul: People Versus Corporate Power* London, Arum Press. pp. 53-4

Bacon's dream rested on nature-in-service to human beings; it also incorporated the creative-imaginal rights and dispositions of man (*sic*). From zoos housing the exotic to the prospect of aesthetic alteration, 'nature's species' found themselves consigned to an exploitable underclass of organisms where only the human imagination limited the extent to which 'she' and 'they' would be tamed. Held in place under the aegis of an anthropic (Christian) God the epistemological-religious supply chain provided language laced with the values of this order, along with a new science that masqueraded as *omniscience*. Here, church and science, one-time combatants, would find ultimate resolution through delineation: church calibrating the moral compass, science honouring 'god' through development. Mediating in this nexus was the emerging modern state. That is, those power relations that arise when regencies, parliaments, economy and class become more fully articulated through the capitalist enterprise.

Within the contemporary setting of a now internationalized (global) regime, the trajectory of the moderns, particularly in relation to knowledge production and production *per se*, is perhaps one of the more significant markers that Whitehead and Stengers included in their explorations. Given the scope and depth of their respective contributions a far broader and more informed re-engagement with 'science' becomes possible. Indeed, it appears evident that neither Whitehead (albeit posthumously) nor Stengers will find themselves alone in the unfolding and various developments that are slowly finding purchase in some of the scholarship and commentary of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The more recent variants of constructivism - the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK), realism and materialism - all deploy some or many of the underlying precepts and processes that belong to a critical (re) examination of existence, life and meaning.

The struggle, it seems, has been a universal constant amongst and between scientists, scholars, commentators, philosophers and theologians. Initially fed by critique, these tensions have more recently started to synthesise into co-creative approaches, some of which turn toward the pressing challenge of actually sustaining life on Earth. In the process, a variety of philosophical, creative-imaginal, scientific and theosophical explorations have come to

characterise some of the new thinking about knowledge, its production and various orientations¹²⁸. Put to the task of considering how we apprehend the world, and by inference, how we might collectively live our lives, this revitalised thinking opens the way for a fuller engagement with *knowing* and *acting*. Here the episteme is brought to the surface in a variety of novel elaborations about the dynamic relationship between reality theorized, and reality manifest. That is, epistemologies are brought into direct relation to their ontological cousins. By extension, and in less abstract terms, the grounded applications of this metaphysical-philosophical project have found a home in disciplines as diverse as environmental sociology, human ecology, ecofeminism and materialism, to name but a few. A particularly salient example of this transformation is the emergent challenge carried through a fusion of critical realism and political ecology. In an extensive rendering of this union Tim Forsyth notes that:

Much discussion of critical realism and environmental issues has focused on philosophical debates concerning the dichotomies of nature/society, people/animals, or women/men...Yet in addition, critical realist arguments are also relevant to debates concerning environmental degradation and the management of ecological resources. *The aim of critical realist research on environmental degradation is to highlight how scientific explanations of environmental change provide only partial insights into complex biophysical processes, and that existing models of explanation reflect the agendas of the societies that created them.* Such explanations are problematic as they may only address certain aspects of biophysical change. Moreover, they may not represent the interests of social groups not included in the science process, particularly in developing countries¹²⁹. [Emphasis added]

Developing a fusion of critical realism and political ecology, Forsyth advances the project of a *realist political ecology*:

The aim of a realist political ecology is to understand the political ramifications of environmental degradation, but in a way that acknowledges the social and political construction of definitions of degradation. But does this mean identifying more accurate (and hence more realist) models of environmental explanation, or simply presenting alternative conceptions of environmental change arising from social groups previously unrepresented in science?¹³⁰

¹²⁸ See for example: Tarnas, R. (1991) *The passion of the Western mind: Understanding the ideas that have shaped our world view*, Ballantine Books, New York; Tarnas, R. (2007) *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New World View*, Plume, New York; Ferrer, J.N (2002) *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality*, SUNY Press, New York.

¹²⁹ Forsyth, T. in Stainer, A. and Lopez, G. (eds.) (2001) *After postmodernism: critical realism?* Athlone Press, London, p. 146

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p.148

Turning to the heart of the issue, Forsyth notes the limits of scientific-academic orthodoxy:

The usual problem discovered by researchers of environmental change in developing countries is that existing – or orthodox – conceptions of environmental degradation simply do not work. There are many examples of such ‘environmental orthodoxies’, including topics such as desertification, deforestation, and soil erosion¹³¹.

The Value of Epistemological Pluralism

What is clear from Forsyth’s article is that the reorientation and expansion of pre-existing knowledge systems, does, in its way, bear some testament to the fact that a fuller engagement is finding some purchase. Indeed, there is a slowly evolving, identifiable interchange and exchange between these sometimes-complimentary fields of endeavour – to the degree that the synthesis of Stengers’ construction may well find a space, and a place, within which organism, thing and object might make home. And just as meaning-making will continue to characterise these academic engagements, so too will it surface in the lives of people who must navigate community life as it morphs its way through each successive challenge.

Following this theme and in complementary relation to Stengers’ work, is a union forged between physics and philosophy. In *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, David Bohm¹³² pursues a similar lexicon of science: namely, the will to concretise separations and hence particular disciplinary versions and visions of the world and its workings. Running counter to this scientific flow, Bohm theorises a connected *wholeness* at work - universally, globally, biologically, socially, culturally and individually. Despite the scientific propensity for delineations between separate spheres, he asserts that beneath and within this wholeness lies a constantly moving *implicate* order that contains an enfolded array of what is to become. The manifestation of that unfolding process is to be found in the planets, galaxies and the universe generally – all of which express the enfolded nature of reality and all that it contains. For Bohm, things are in a constant state of becoming. To be sure, they stabilise and

¹³¹ Forsyth, T. in Stainer, A. and Lopez, G. (eds.) (2001) *After postmodernism: critical realism?* Athlone Press, London, p. 148

¹³² Bohm, D. & Ebooks Corporation (2002) *Wholeness And The Implicate Order*, Routledge, Hoboken

become manifest. Following in their trail is each successive and enfolded feature of being and becoming.

Bohm's thesis centres on the twenty billion year unfolding of Earth, where the enfolded character of the planet became manifest, starting with single-celled organisms, moving out through species that increased in number and diversity. About 200,000 years ago, with prevailing conditions optimal, *homo sapiens* arrived. Bohm contends that while this process holds for successive species emergence, so too does it in relation to knowledge, science and social organization. This unfolding is therefore inevitably expressed in increasing levels of diversity, development and sophistication.

Yet the arrival of *homo sapiens* added another highly significant dimension to his thesis of unfoldment. That is, it brought to bear a paradox that would impact upon the very process of universal unfolding. In particular, he observes that as a *sentient* species we do not merely occupy and evolve, rather, we fragment the world about us, the better to come to know it¹³³. We break up and divide our knowledge systems, our sciences, and set about our researches and investigations in a usually fragmented and often times disconnected manner. In like fashion, we develop production and consumption processes, the better able to manage, control and order the various universes of our acting. Within this construction, our consciousness wraps itself in language that reinforces the assumption that, because we can craft order through specialisation, we can be definitive in our decisions and acting.

The intractability of *fixed* laws and states, by definition, obscures the constant movement of all things, which, in their complex totality, inhere to constitute the lifeworld of *all* species. The scientific capture of 'objective' fact stabilises *the object* whilst simultaneously obscuring its dynamic relation and flow within the broader domain that it occupies. More to the point, the precise conditions under which science – in this case physics – will determine the ways and means by which the 'object' comes to be known are in effect its

¹³³ Bohm, D. & Ebooks Corporation (2002) *Wholeness And The Implicate Order*, Routledge, Hoboken, pp. 1-33

greatest limiting feature. Here a prevailing delusion surfaces, namely that the wholeness of a state or condition has been apprehended when in fact, only the *isolated part, aspect or characteristic under scrutiny is apprehended*.

Bohm's thesis avoids any significant meeting with history, yet his claim to unfoldment is, nonetheless, played out through the various scientific developments that bear testament to it. Perhaps one of the most striking examples of this process is Newtonian physics and the subsequent development of Einstein's special and general theories of relativity; just as attachments to the Newtonian mechanic were slow to yield, so too Einstein as he confronted the quantum domain of Niels Bohr and those who followed¹³⁴.

While this work evolved from an engagement with quantum physics, it is congruent with the work of James Lovelock whose disciplinary expertise includes chemistry, medicine and engineering. More usually, Lovelock is acknowledged as an eminent biologist and atmospheric scientist, inventing the electron capture detector, a device used to detect minute traces of toxic chemicals in the atmosphere. The detector enabled research into chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's) and Lovelock subsequently became instrumental in alerting the scientific community to the build up of CFC's, which threatened the stratospheric ozone layer through the creation of the 'greenhouse' effect¹³⁵.

In 1988 he published *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth*¹³⁶. Recast as living organism, the Gaia of Lovelock's construction owed her name to the Greek goddess of the Earth. In company with Lynn Margulis, microbiologist, Lovelock moved away from orthodox geology and established a new science of 'bodily processes' that could be said to apply to planet Earth – geophysiology. This shift responded to the need to develop an integrated view of Earth as organism, rather than mere mechanism. In the process

¹³⁴ Bohm, D. & Ebooks Corporation (2002) *Wholeness And The Implicate Order*, Routledge, Hoboken, pp. 155-162

¹³⁵ CFC production was banned in the USA, Canada, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, with voluntary restrictions in Australia, West Germany, Switzerland and Japan as a result of Lovelock's work (see: Joseph, 1990: 169)

¹³⁶ Lovelock, J. (1988) *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of our Living Earth*, W.W. Norton & Co, New York

Lovelock and Margulis hoped to capture the imagination of the scientific and broader community alike. Their prevailing thesis was that Earth functioned as any organism – human or other – and that its relative health depended upon due regard for that organic functioning.

As Lovelock observed

...I think of Earth as a living organism. The rocks, the air, the oceans, and all life are an inseparable system that functions to keep the planet liveable. In fact, I now believe that life can exist *only* on a planetary scale. Can't have a planet with sparse life any more than you can have half a cat.¹³⁷

It was perhaps inevitable that Lovelock and Margulis' *Gaia Theory* would provoke a range of mixed responses in the scientific community of the 1980's and 90's. Decidedly new-age when counter-positioned against the more orthodox elements of that community, Gaia took time to gain purchase on the many and varied specialised sciences that initially rejected the thesis. Yet, persuasive, empirically grounded research, along with mounting challenges to Earth's atmospheric integrity, culminated in broad acceptance of Lovelock's unifying construction. Indeed, Gaia still had her critics, but many now operated in a spirit of constructive challenge, in large part because evidence of climatic change was mounting. As Schneider, then deputy director of the National Centre for Atmospheric Research, noted in 1989

It is virtually beyond dispute that the Earth modifies itself due to a complex of organic and inorganic interactions. Lovelock once observed that there are biologists studying bugs on the ground who have noticed that methane was being released, but it didn't mean much to them. And that there are aeronomists studying the upper atmosphere who have noticed the methane but knew nothing of the bugs...The Gaia hypothesis is a brilliant organizing principle for bringing people together who don't normally talk to each other, like biologists, geochemists and atmospheric physicists, to ask profound questions...¹³⁸

Commensurate, yet temporally distanced from Lovelock's Gaia, is the work of Charles Birch. In *Biology and the Riddle of Life*¹³⁹ Birch takes up the meaning of life and its richness, rejecting the reductionism so characteristic of the sciences within which he enjoyed membership. Emeritus Professor of Biology at the University of Sydney in 1999 he had, for many years, been as much engaged by the philosophy of biology as he was by biology as science. Indeed, he traverses philosophy, theology, ethics and meaning, as well as the more

¹³⁷ Joseph, L.E. (1990) *Gaia: The Growth of an Idea* St. Martin's Press, New York, p.3

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.3

¹³⁹ Birch, C. (1999) *Biology And The Riddle Of Life*, UNSW Press, Sydney

empirical and familiar ground of his own science. Emphatic about the impacts of dissonance and fragmentation on human and other species, Birch engages directly with the idea of an ecologically sustainable society that rests on the intrinsic valuing of all species. In grounding his position, he references the contribution of Alfred North Whitehead¹⁴⁰ in building a coherent architecture within which all life can be more meaningfully understood. Critical of the mechanistic science of his contemporaries, particularly that of Richard Dawkins¹⁴¹, Birch draws heavily on Whitehead's elaboration of the modernist project and its limitations. As with Stengers, he explores what amounts to a similar synthesis of ideas and engagements that flow from a critical reading of the limits modernist science. Here the mechanistic force of dualisms and binaries are tracked as they make their way into the contemporary claims-making processes that emerge from various sub-disciplinary specialisations, in particular gene and DNA manipulation. Here, the (current) much-vaunted prospect of developing a grand theory of everything (TOE), which still holds some currency as possibility, is supplanted by Birch as he explores the emergent thesis and 'organic' nature of life at a planetary level. Notably, the mechanistic force of particular specialisations have lent much to the project of challenging and redressing the deterministic hue of science. One of the critical, underlying drivers that appears to propel the current state of science is the now expanded range of gene therapies that have flowed from the human genome project. That is, the degrees of successful manipulation with regard to a range of diseases and disorders have, in and of themselves, reconstituted the *social and economic* value of science¹⁴². What they have not done is to render the planetary realm any more readable, knowable or coherent. In effect, the actual province of (some) sub-disciplinary fields remains invigorated by nothing more than investments within their own settings and contexts. That this *mechanism* should ultimately explain anything other than itself arises as the only outcome of this project. By contrast, the symbolic attribution of life-as-organism implies a relational interactivity that demands engagements beyond borders and boundaries – one that has already led to a fuller reading of complex contexts that host a range of exchanges.

¹⁴⁰ Birch, C. (1999) *Biology and the Riddle of Life*, UNSW Press: Sydney

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 9

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p. 71

In engaging with notions of value, and the ways in which valuing is enacted, Birch confronts the romanticism of current nature-religion mythologies that avert their gaze from a reinvigorated science that deploys its empiricism in a coherent manner. Similarly, he addresses some of the limits of contemporary environmental movements that ascribe to nature the inherent quality of equilibrium. That is to say, Birch draws out the absence of informed engagement in some preservation and conservation movements through a detailed examination of the constant flux normally attributed to 'nature' as it behaves within delineated ecosystems¹⁴³.

Like Stengers, Birch engages with a need to reorient science away from mechanism and toward organism. Insofar as the character and scale of organicism is concerned here, all of the preceding authors note that the complexities inherent in organisms arise through their varying levels of intensity, interactivity and relationality. In putting the case for community to extend beyond the human, the socially constructed idea of community is, then, reconstituted as a broad ranging, integrated aliveness that *includes* humanity, *alongside all other species, geologies and so on*. Similarly, the dynamic force of construction and transformation that occurs within this relational flux, applies not only to, but well beyond the human realm.

The contribution of these authors to this work registers in their specific yet complimentary approaches to the split between human and 'other' that for each of them had a two-fold effect. In the first instance, fragmenting the ways in which we apprehend the world arises and is conditioned by our knowledge systems themselves. Secondly, and just as importantly, the ways in which we reproduce that fragmentation through disciplinary specialisations extends the reach of polarities, binaries and exclusions. In addressing themselves to these issues they each adopt a philosophical posture that provides a starting point in redressing the fragmentary nature of knowledge production. That said, the philosophical hue of their work in no way diminishes the importance and empirical character of the physical sciences within which all have enjoyed membership. Indeed, all articulate the very precise linkages between the empirical dimensions of their respective

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 91-108

sciences with a revitalised and broader framing within which the more usual orthodox and mechanistic empiricism is dispatched. For Bohm, the physics of movement, rather than stasis, underscores his framing of the universal and planetary, as well as the more grounded and local. Relational and emergent features of development and evolution are similarly ascribed to language and knowledge. For Lovelock and Margulis, coherence is a first principle in framing research and scholarship, along with ontological and epistemological development. In the process, the Gaia hypothesis initially provokes the orthodoxy of contemporary science, only to engage it thereafter. In similar fashion Birch explores the limits of his own science, biology, through a re-engagement with the notion of life not only on a planetary scale, but also at the equally complex and local level of community.

For Stengers a co-constructivist approach leads to a new synthesis of science, social science and philosophy. With a turn to the implied coherence of ecology, this fusion finds effect as:

...*An ecology of practices* (which) may be an instance of what Gilles Deleuze called 'thinking par le milieu', using the French double meaning of milieu, both the middle and the surroundings or habitat. 'Through the middle' would mean without grounding definitions or an ideal horizon. 'With the surroundings' would mean that no theory gives you the power to disentangle something from its particular surroundings, that is, to go beyond the particular towards something we would be able to recognize and grasp in spite of particular appearances¹⁴⁴. [Emphasis added]

In pursuing this theme, Stengers draws ethology into the realm of the ecological, where the watcher is thus drawn into the milieu in which thinking takes place. Summarizing an ecology of practices she contends that:

...(T)here is no identity of a practice independent of its environment. This emphatically does not mean that the identity of a practice may be derived from its environment. Thinking 'par le milieu' does not give power to the environment...Spinoza might say to us, we do not know what a practice is able to become; what we know instead is that the very way we define, or address, a practice is part of the surroundings which produces its ethos¹⁴⁵.

An ecology of practices implies linkages between the ontological and epistemological dimensions of knowledge production, and Stengers brings that process into sharp relief through *A Constructivist Reading of Process and*

¹⁴⁴ Stengers, I. (2008) 'A Constructivist Reading of Process and Reality', *Theory, Culture, Society*, Vol. 25(4), p. 187

¹⁴⁵ Stengers, I. (2005) 'An ecology of practices', *Cultural Studies Review*, Vol.11 (1), p.97

*Reality*¹⁴⁶. Without reiterating her earlier cited engagement with Whitehead, it is nonetheless a central theme of her exploration that constructivism as she applies it 'refers to ...the need to actively and explicitly relate any knowledge production to the question that it tries to answer, and refuses to transform knowledge into the kind of neutral statement which comes from no-*where* [emphasis added] and which could be called a 'conception of the world'¹⁴⁷.

The significance of her work to this project is the degree to which it enables a broadening of the scope of *thinking* about what it takes to sustain a community. That is to say, *thinking* is activated *within* the locale and combines with what lies beyond it: science, knowledge, data and so on. Into this flux tumble both readings of the environment: the immediate and the more remote. Replete with tension and paradox a fuller *meeting* with community then becomes possible.

The respective contributions of the authors cited above have a distinct value, yet the historical context within which relations of power inhere within knowledge production does not figure prominently. In addressing this issue I turn to the work of two scholars whose ecofeminist contribution counterpositions the nature-human binary in quite different yet still complimentary ways.

Notable here is Carolyn Merchant's pivotal work¹⁴⁸, which draws embedded relations of power into the frame of medieval and modern history. Here the analogous relation between the subjugation of women and nature is extended to the point where both are incorporated into hierarchies of power and exploitation. Of particular concern are the dualisms and splits which confer value and status on those involved in the production of knowledge, yet always to the detriment of dislocated beings and environments subject to the enactment of that knowledge.

¹⁴⁶ Stengers, I. (2008) 'A Constructivist Reading of Process and Reality', *Theory, Culture, Society*, Vol. 25(4), pp. 91-110

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.92

¹⁴⁸ Merchant, C. (1980) *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, Harper Collins, New York

Articulating her own confrontation with these issues Merchant notes that:

My own efforts to deal with the problems of essentialism and nature/culture dualism led me to develop a form of socialist ecofeminism rooted not in dualism but in the dialectics of production and reproduction that I had articulated in *The Death of Nature*. There I had argued that nature cast in the female gender, when stripped of activity and rendered passive, could be dominated by science, technology, and capitalist production. During the transition to early modern capitalism, women lost ground in the sphere of production (through curtailment of their roles in the trades), while in the sphere of reproduction William Harvey and other male physicians were instrumental in undermining women's traditional roles in midwifery and hence women's control over their own bodies. During the same period, Francis Bacon advocated extracting nature's secrets from "her" bosom through science and technology. The subjugation of nature as female ...was thus integral to the scientific method as power over nature: "As woman's womb had symbolically yielded to the forceps, so nature's womb harbored secrets that through technology could be wrested from her grasp for use in the improvement of the human condition."¹⁴⁹

Importantly, the political dimension of her work is concerned with 'dialectical relationships between production and reproduction (which) became the basis for a socialist ecofeminism grounded in material change'¹⁵⁰. In relation to the 'problem of depicting nature as female, and its conflation with women' she goes on to 'advocate the removal of gendered terminology from the description of nature and the substitution of the gender-neutral term "partner."' This led her 'to articulate an ethic of partnership with nature in which nature was no longer symbolized as mother, virgin, or witch but instead as an active partner with humanity'¹⁵¹.

In effect, Merchant's contribution extends the value of the previous authors in that it exposes embedded power relations. In its way, it incites activism across broad ranging contexts and supports a re-meeting with the restrictive human-nature binary that expressed the hierarchical relations between humanity and nature, as well as those of gender and race. In relation to this work, the value of Merchant's critical insights lies in a coherent approach to understanding the ways in which ecological and material changes are fused to the rise of mechanistic thinking that still characterizes 'science', politics and environmental governance.

¹⁴⁹ Merchant, C. (2006) 'The Scientific Revolution and the Death of Nature', *Isis*, vol. 7, no. 3 (September), pp.514-515

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 515

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.515

Val Plumwood extends the themes articulated by Merchant in two of her better known works, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*¹⁵² and *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*¹⁵³. In exposing the condition of hyper-separation foundational to the hegemony of rational science, she reveals the dualism that infuses various 'categories' with their separateness: human-animal, mind-body, reason-emotion and so on. As a counterforce she proposes an ethical relation between people and environments, such that these dualisms evaporate in the face of their integrated place in the lifeworld. Actively involved in preservation and valuing of nature Plumwood campaigned for environment and species' rights¹⁵⁴ and demonstrated the ways in which thinking and acting become fused when a coherent ethic is at work.

Drawing the contributions of these authors forward, Chapter Three moves to explore the ways in which the presence of the past asserts itself. In reviewing the transition from feudalism to capitalism in England and Scotland, science and technology are re-visited, especially as they combine with economic imperatives to create the very conditions under which a new social order is secured. Underscored by fragmentation and differentiation, and manifesting in a metabolic rift that develops between humanity and the natural environment, old feudal relations are dispatched.

In lock-step with the playing out of these critical processes, tensions between social dislocation and notions of progress reach their peak. Inevitably, the colliding worlds of privilege and poverty explode as the push to colonize new worlds takes on the hue of an urgent imperative. Played out on the distant shores of New South Wales¹⁵⁵, social, cultural and racial hierarchies nurtured in the heart of Empire will be replicated. Indeed, so robust will be the transportation of those values that they will, like the banished 'felons' that accompany them, endure well into the contemporary present.

¹⁵² Plumwood, V. (1993) *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, Sydney

¹⁵³ Plumwood, V. (2002) *Environmental Culture: the Ecological Crisis of Reason*, Routledge, Sydney

¹⁵⁴ Plumwood, V. (2003) 'The Fight for the Forests Revisited, paper delivered to Win, Lose or Draw: the Fight for the Forests?' A Symposium, Old Canberra House, Australian National University, 14 October 2003. <http://cres.anu.edu.au/fffweb/plumwood1.pdf>

¹⁵⁵ The continent now known as Australia was initially designated New South Wales on August 21 1770 when Captain James Cook landed on Possession Island; there he laid claim to all land south of where he stood in the name of George III.

Chapter 3

The Presence of the Past

At their heart, our orthodox histories usually depict a delineated relation between the 'now' that we confront in the contemporary present and the 'then' that we consign to the past. The events, conditions and contexts that characterise the narrative of these various accounts consistently register our collective evolution as a species, along with the iconic nature of our progress. In similar fashion, the various worlds that constitute the ground of our human associations have been elevated to universal prominence and value through international charters, conventions and protocols designed to protect those worlds from untrammelled despoliation and degradation¹⁵⁶. Indeed, the very idea that we must sustain the environments that we occupy, and which yield the means of our developmental evolution, now stands as an embedded testament to our knowledge about what it takes to ensure the continuity of a living world.

Yet, despite the patent advances in our collective, environmental and humanitarian endeavours these same histories that register our progress just as surely fail to account for the ways in which the past drawn into the present. Consider the current enslavement of child labour consigned to sweatshops, fields and factories¹⁵⁷, and add to it the pervasive bigotry and moral rectitude that drives invasions, incursions and spiritually sanctioned murder on a mass scale¹⁵⁸. Step back and away from the present and the transformations that draw us forward in time challenge the more orthodox construction of 'then' and 'now'. Indeed, our sovereignty over reason looks decidedly less secure

¹⁵⁶ Brundtland Commission 1987 (World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, New York); Earth Summit 1992 (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development); Kyoto Protocol 2001; Stockholm (United Nations Conference on the Human Environment I, 1972)

¹⁵⁷ See: Foundation of International Research on Working Children (IREWOC) (2005), 'Studying Child Labour: Policy Implications of Child Centred Research' info@irewoc.nl; www.irewoc.nl; The World Bank (2001), 'Issues in Child Labour in Africa', Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series; 'Child Labour in the Coffee Sector of Guatemala', *The IREWOC Research Project on the worst Forms of Child Labour in Latin America*, Luisa Quiroz 2008, International Labour Organization, 'Child Labour in Africa' (2005) Child Labor. Paper 10. <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/child/10>; 'Report on the Rapid Assessment Study on Child Labour in selected coffee and tea plantations in Ethiopia', *Ethiopian Employer's Federation and International Labour Organization* (2005)

¹⁵⁸ Applicable here are those Christian, Judaic and Islamic genocides that rest on fundamentalist doctrines that demand the extermination of any and all theosophies and theologies that run counter to their specific provenance.

when we re-enter the past with these paradoxical registers of the present in tow. More importantly, perhaps, the prospect of sustaining our ways of living, as well as the broader environments that support life itself, starts to shrink.

In establishing the critical importance of history in relation to the various constructions of a post-millennial present, three overarching features of progress and development warrant some consideration, particularly as they impact upon the ways in which we navigate a way forward in addressing the challenges that come with that development.

Firstly, the dispatch of epochs to *the past* aligns with the notion of transcendence and completion, where what once was, no longer is. Displaced by the motif of progress, the past is, by definition, something that is done and over. Indeed, once temporally situated, the collective letting go of *what was* enables a mad embrace of *what is* and what might be. In the process, whatever value (or lessons) might be drawn from the thinking and acting of the past is relinquished, sometimes at detriment.

Secondly, by extension and imbued with just as much importance, are the various *ways* in which the past is read. That is to say, the partialities of that reading, in and of themselves, disable the building of a coherent relation, not only to the past, but just as importantly, to the ways in which it might inform the present. For example, the fragmentary nature of our various knowledge streams itself arises from processes that disassemble coherence. In the playing out of this dissembling, the complex of material conditions that are usually cast as ecosystems more often than not find themselves displaced by a 'developmental' imperative. Here, a range of signifiers is brought to bear to add weight and legitimacy to the notion of development generally, as well as its specific orientations - *economic, technological, scientific* and so on. In that process those previous *things of value* that might have been drawn into the present remain either idle or lost. Within the confines of this space, notions of value find themselves trapped as the 'psychic additions' of Whitehead's construction in that they serve only to underwrite social and cultural norms. The counterpoint to this lies in a fuller reading of history, one which may

carry the potential to reinstate experiential knowledge, along with the more integral variants of scholarship, science and spirituality that pertain to the care and management of the social-material realm.

Finally, the issue of *what* is valued, particularly as it steers the gaze, reveals not only the differential manifestations of human endeavour, but also their limits. In so far as this work engages with community sustainability, the *what* that pertains to value is refracted through the prism of progress, which so often distorts the character, and therefore the value of the ground beneath our feet. This interplay finds its most explicit effect in the recalibration of the *elements* – earth, water, air and sunlight. Transformed by the totality of the planetary biosphere they become a sustenance base of *resources* that constitutes the necessary and sufficient conditions for all life to flourish. It is here, at this extended temporal juncture between sustenance and progress, that *flourishing* is imbued with new meaning. Driven not only by *what* is valued, but *how* the process of that valuing plays out, these elements-turned-resources enter their final transformation to become *commodities*. In the process, *value* is recalibrated, giving effect to new relationships between species and environments. Here, the increasingly dissonant flow of change and transformation is turned back on itself through the degradation of land (soil), waterways (seas and rivers) and air. The only element thus far ‘untouched’ now brought to such radiant intensity that it cooks the heavens, earth and sea.

In documenting the vanishing worlds of our evanescent past, a critical re-reading of history attests to a central feature of development that *never* vanishes: the *form* of our progress may change, but the escalating intensity with which it does so is merely an extension of processes that are inherited. That is to say, a critical re-engagement with history exposes the resonant nature of that past as it inheres in the present. The value of this revelation lies, perhaps, in its lesson, which not only implies that we should revisit the past with the present in tow, but more importantly, draw from it those salient insights and knowledge that have been (largely) consigned to the status of *done, finished, over*.

Clearly, then, the resonance of the past carries a challenge to re-couple and reset what is 'lost' or 'gone' with what *is*, along with the process of its *becoming*. Far from constituting a bid to turn back the clock, this is a process of reclamation, one that asserts the value of re-forming scattered temporal narratives into a more coherent articulation of the ways in which the human species might reconsider its relational position to those elements and resources that it will always require.

David Gross¹⁵⁹ presents some of the deeper, though perhaps less obvious forces at work that order our often-times dissonant relationship with the past. Indeed, the ways and means by which publics dispatch the past does itself change through time. Characterised by temporal markers that shift, by turns, from regret and loss over what is passing, to relief and then excitement about what might become, are the attitudes, values, artefacts and overarching institutions that express the character of our collective relationship to the various epochs that we traverse.

Navigating this relationship Gross turns initially to the pre- and early modern period and focuses on the place of external objects and social values. As he observes, this was a period which operated within a 'present' where 'objects slipped into the past at a glacially slow pace...once created and introduced, they endured for decades or generations'¹⁶⁰. To *discard* was not an automatic option; rather, repair and restoration were normative, as was collective familiarity with things that endured – from the material realm of environments and objects, to ways of living. He continues:

Formally, there were numerous institutions, rites and rituals designed to keep the central meanings and beliefs of the *habitus* alive and active...there were countless traditions and folkways which, when taken altogether, had the effect of reinforcing the dominant system of values over the span of centuries. Hence, in pre-modern times there was no strong sense that things were slipping away, because...the pace of evanescence was so protracted that for all practical purposes it was imperceptible. As a result, all the things that mattered seemed not to be vanishing, but rather to be readily available as part of the vary fabric of social life.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Gross, D. (2002) 'Vanishing Worlds: On Dealing with what is Passing Away', *Telos*, 124 (Summer): 55-70

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 55

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.56

Subsequently, he moves into the modern period, a place where certainties and dependabilities evaporate. Here the reach and speed of social change installed impermanence and disruption as new and characteristic markers of development. This period, from the 16th to 17th centuries, saw the unleashing 'of political, economic and technological forces' that destabilised the long established. Values attributed to things that had endured fell away and a new willingness to let them go once they had served their purpose took hold:

Along with the diminished perdurance of social objects there also emerged a fascination – even a bedazzlement – with the 'new' in whatever form it might appear. Thanks to the advances of an increasingly efficient capitalist system, a plethora of freshly manufactured objects (produced literally by the billions as commodities) now began to inundate even the most hidden nooks and crannies of modern life. In comparison to these attractive new objects, the still enduring old ones seemed to be embarrassingly out of date.¹⁶²

(As a point of interest, Gross notes that 'the very term "out-of-date" makes its appearance at this time' and would have had no meaning before the modern period.)

Thus, with the fading of physical objects from the milieu of the early modern period, there was a similar dissipation in social relations; where once physical objects had held a mediating influence between people and their environments, so too the social connections that had been anchored in those relations. With 'the disappearance of things as mediators between people, many of the old ties linking the individual to the larger community likewise lost their *raison d'être*'.¹⁶³

This exploration extends profitably beyond modernity, yet the remit here is not to discount certain of the notable developments of the period, particularly in medical science, engineering, agrarian reforms and so on. Neither is it to avoid some reckoning with the adversities that also characterised communal and social life. Rather, it is to situate change processes in their time so that the *features* as well as the *content* of that change can be grasped, particularly as it reverberates well into the post-millennial context. The re-search here is, then, directed to a fuller and more critical understanding of the ways and means by

¹⁶² *ibid.*, p. 57

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p.57

which we discard, or retain and intensify, the forces that order not only social life, but just as importantly, the material conditions that support it.

Articulating a 'present field of possibilities' with regard to the ways in which we might apprehend the past, Gross avoids the resurrection of romanticism and longing that sometimes accompanies regret at what is passing. Instead he detours around the *halt of progress* as an icon of that romanticism and resituates the field of possibilities with regard to what is passing by transporting it into the present:

Today one may be too quick in declaring worthless all that is not immediately useful, for what might seem irrelevant or valueless in a narrowly pragmatic sense may be highly relevant and valuable in a broader one. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, those who keep in mind what is departing may have more resources available to them, and therefore be better positioned to live critically and creatively in the present, than those who dismiss or simply forget what is slipping away in order to remain more fully in tune with the present fast-paced age.¹⁶⁴

What emerges from Gross's coverage is the need for a critical re-meeting with notions of 'the past' – one that carries with it an imperative to undertake some equivalent re-thinking with regard to the critical forces that drive both social and environmental degradation. To locate the genesis and flow of that process this chapter turns to an epoch that carries one of its starkest registers – the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In focusing on the case of England and Scotland three features of that transition are prominent, particularly because of their resonance within the present.

The Rise of Institutions

In the first instance, the transformation of feudalism in England was mediated not only by the rise of money and markets, but just as importantly, by monarchies, parliaments and the (Christian) church. As critical social institutions all three worked within a tension that ultimately destabilised the precise conditions under which feudalism could continue. While two of these specific institutions no longer occupy the foreground of economic development (monarchies and church), the place and role of institutions generally was critical to both the emergence and the continuity of capitalism,

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 70

just as it was (and is) in the dislocation and (re)distribution of human and other species populations.

Combined and Uneven Development

Secondly, combined and uneven development emerged as the central motif of capitalism during the period and extends well beyond it. That is, the dispatch of feudal relations in England occurred over a period of some centuries; by contrast Scotland was transported through the process in less than a century. Indeed, the transition here was fast-tracked to the degree that the potential inhibitors to Scottish development were removed apace, to the degree that it became a prototype for development that was applied throughout Europe and Japan¹⁶⁵ during the nineteenth century. Here, the manner in which the 'developed' economies steer or influence their less developed cohorts becomes critical, and similarly endures over time.

Social-Environmental Dislocation: The colonization of worlds old and new

Finally, the cumulative effects of both the orientation and rapidity of this transformation led to *social and environmental* changes that extended well into the two centuries that followed. For those who had been liberated from their lands during the enclosures and clearances, poverty became an inevitable driver of rapidly increasing crime rates. With the prisons of the eighteenth century breaching capacity, and no police force yet in place, the parlous state of civil order fell into such decline that a solution had to be found. Unintended though it was in its first iteration, transportation became the means by which pre-existing relations of power, along with rights in land, drove the establishment of new colonies.

While much is made of the various and progressive reforms that also characterised this period, the enduring presence of a less than progressive legacy summons its history. In turning to these overarching issues, the following review locates the genesis of some of the more critical issues that have been carried forward into the contemporary present.

¹⁶⁵ Davidson, N., (2004) 'The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 2: The Capitalist Offensive (1747-1815)' *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 4, No.4, October, pp.419-420

The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism

The Case of England

The Enclosures: Upending social-environmental relations

In England, feudal social relations that had generally prevailed for some centuries were recast in 1235 when the Statute of Merton¹⁶⁶ gave effect to the enclosing of common lands. Mediated by the establishment of title deeds, the stage was set for monarchs, bishops and lords to sweep aside the notional rights of the peasantry to its former way of life. In its playing out, un-fenced holdings upon which peasants had subsisted, grazed cattle and run pigs and poultry, transformed into one where the reach of an emerging landed class would be extended through mass appropriations, more commonly, the enclosures.

On the face of it, the impetus was to concentrate the productivity of pastureland for sheep grazing in order to meet increasing demand for wool in Europe¹⁶⁷. Yet more broadly, the motive force of profit, along with money as a medium of exchange, began to find effect. Despite the fact that the process appears glacially slow by contemporary standards, the period from the 13th to the 15th centuries constituted a critical moment in the transition to a new mode of production. Indeed, it was one in which the force of change would be unleashed with such uncontained reach that it would extend well beyond the territories in which it began.

The forces at work in this overarching transformation are located in the social milieu of the early enclosures. Characteristically, this was a period where produce and services constituted the predominant means by which the peasantry met the rent burden of their tenancies. In the case of England and much of Europe, the landowning class did little, and in most cases nothing, to improve the productivity of their lands. Indeed, their various holdings had been established to ensure maximum gain for minimal investment.

¹⁶⁶ McIntosh, op.cit., p. 92

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*, p.92

With the number of tenants large enough to supply requisite rents, in kind as services and produce, the much-stratified peasantry had been the only consistent force in agrarian improvements, especially during the period from 11th to 13th centuries¹⁶⁸. As Katz notes:

The heavy plough and the improved harnessing techniques necessary to draw it; the larger fields appropriate to the new ploughing techniques; the two-and three-field system of crop rotation; cropping changes such as the substitution of wheat for rye as the primary winter crop – these striking innovations in medieval agricultural technology and land management were pioneered by the peasantry.¹⁶⁹

The oppressive nature of these social relations notwithstanding, the peasantry of medieval England held an enduring relationship to the land. In addition, the means of production – the land itself - whilst not directly owned by the peasantry, was no less generally and immediately available as both home and workplace. Here, the productivity of land was attributable to feudal social relations, particularly because nascent capitalism was not yet in a position to displace those relations. By contrast, what followed during the period from the mid fifteenth to the late seventeenth centuries¹⁷⁰ constituted an irreversible transformational process, one driven by increasing commodity production, coupled with the advent of money as a medium of exchange, along with expanding markets, controlled trade routes and a burgeoning industrial sector. All these cemented the ownership and control of land as a cornerstone of ‘progress’ and ‘improvements’.

Social and economic imperatives that upended and subsequently reformed feudal agriculture were coupled with grazing and wool production as the effective means by which rapid capital accumulation – precursor of the new mode of production - would find effect. Indeed, so intense was the drive to convert agricultural land into pasture that by 1700, 75% of land had been acquired through some 4,000 Private Acts of Enclosure. By 1845 the General Act of Enclosure had all but completed a mass transfer of land holdings from the ‘common people’ to a landowning class. By 1876, so devastatingly

¹⁶⁸ Davidson, op.cit., 231

¹⁶⁹ Katz, C. (1993) “Karl Marx On The Transition From Feudalism To Capitalism”, *Theory And Society*, 22, p.370

¹⁷⁰ Davidson, N., (2004) ‘The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 1: From the Crisis of Feudalism to the Origins of Agrarian Transformation (1688-1746)’, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 4, No.3, July, p. 231

effective was the process that a mere 0.6% of the total population of England owned 98.5% of all land¹⁷¹.

In a comprehensive account of the period Davidson's observations develop considerable detail about the nature of these transformative shifts:

In response to these developments the feudal system began to display two new characteristics, both of which however left the central exploitative process unchanged. One was the form in which surplus was appropriated. The general commutation of servile dues and the attendant shifts from *labour rent* through *rent in kind* to *money rent* refined the system without bringing about the domination of capitalist relations of production – the existence of money being a necessary but insufficient condition for this to take place. The other was in the nature of the state. By the middle of the fifteenth century absolutism [that political system that invests absolute power in a monarch] had begun to replace the estates monarchies of military feudalism as the typical state form across most of Europe.¹⁷²
[Insertion added]

Unsettling Relations of Power : Church and State

Just as monarchs, peers and parliaments mediated in the institutionalised servitude of the common people, so religion regulated the broader array of values that ordered social life for all classes. Throughout medieval England and Europe the reach and legitimacy of the Roman Catholic Church had been secured by fusing its role as agent of the sacred to the social order of day-to-day life. Pervasive in its presence the church stood beside, rather than beneath the regents, enjoying favour in the form of wealth, property and shared dominion over the broader population from which it extracted its own bounty in tithes, indulgences and services.

Historically, the relationship between church and monarch had been forged in a spirit of mutual benefit. Patronage on the part of the regents was exchanged for the legitimising imprimatur of the church. Each of these institutions enjoyed dominion over the vast majority of the population and, occasional plotting aside, both ruled territories that were clearly delineated: in the case of the monarch, the material world; for the church, the invisible, yet still powerful domain of the sacred¹⁷³.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.92

¹⁷² Davidson, N., (2004) 'The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 2: The Capitalist Offensive (1747-1815)', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 4, No.4, October, p. 232

¹⁷³ Bell, M. (2004) *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology* (2nd ed.), Sage, London, pp.129-132 and Davidson, N., *op cit.* pp.227-264

This arrangement had effectively and consistently ordered the social life of early medieval England and Europe until a critical disruption, which came with the accession of the Tudors to the English throne. Here, despite its sanctified and legitimate place, the Roman Catholic Church found itself unprepared and ill-equipped to deal with its most non-compliant regent, Henry VIII. Henry's contest with Catholicism was less invested with a challenge to the sanctity of the Church and its doctrines than it was imbued with naked self-interest. Lamenting a marriage from which he sought escape, Henry was faced with a central canon of Catholic dogma – namely, its prohibition on divorce. Determined to rid himself of his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, Henry chose an innovative course: to distort Catholic law. Accordingly, he invoked the Act of Supremacy, which made him head of the Church *in* England. Subsequently, in 1533, he annulled his marriage to Catherine and married Ann Boleyn. In upending this particular spiritual canon, Henry's incipient reforms began a process that would erode the traction of Catholicism in England.

While the Catholic Church had lost some purchase in its melee with Henry, it was no less resolved to cling to it as dissent and disaffection spread throughout Europe and England. The prospect of a religious reformation that would diminish its place and power, combined with the challenge of an enlightened science to its doctrinaire grip, propelled the Catholic Church into a vigorous response. In 1542 an ecclesiastical tribunal, more usually the European Inquisition, was established. Here dissenters of every hue, along with those suspected of assorted offences against God could be tried, tortured and put to death in the face of various 'blasphemies'¹⁷⁴.

The Inquisition was to endure for some three centuries, yet the intervening power plays between monarchy and church were to culminate in a broadly pitched onslaught against the church's corruption, institutionalised violence and surreptitious plots. Confronted by the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church would not cede its power and authority without a pitched battle, and while the project of reforming Catholicism in England initially failed, it simultaneously opened a door that was to see its power base

¹⁷⁴ Given, J., (2001) *The Inquisition and Medieval Society*, Cornell University Press, New York

obliterated. What had begun with her father's more personal whim, Elizabeth I elaborated on a grander scale; instead of reforming the Roman Catholic Church *in* England, Elizabeth established the new Church *of* England. It was 1559, only two decades after Henry's first attempt to contain the reach of the Catholic Church and adapt it to his own immediate and more personal needs. In effect, the dispatch of Catholicism was far better orchestrated by Elizabeth, but there remained one final hurdle to its demise which was to come some fifty years after her death¹⁷⁵.

James II, a committed Catholic, ascended the throne of England in 1685 amidst divided views and significant tensions. Absolutist and militaristic, James antagonised sections of both the Anglican Church and the English Parliament. Within three years, the many and varied onslaughts that James wrought on both parliament and the judiciary culminated in his overthrow in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Led by William of Orange, his daughter Mary's husband, Protestantism was again reaffirmed in England. With it came an end to absolutism along with the consolidation of parliament's power, both necessary precursors to the rise of the state and the development of capitalism. Indeed, by the time the Glorious Revolution had run its short course, England had virtually completed the transition from feudalism to capitalism¹⁷⁶. With the dispatch of James II, constraints on economic development were lifted as the private ownership of land and the development of new markets finally upended feudal agrarian production.

Clearly, the social and religious dimensions of post-Reformation England helped consolidate a new relationship between church and state. In particular, the fusion of moral-ethical values to economic imperatives underscored the agrarian reforms and industrial revolution that was to follow. Christianity had generally played its part in the subjugation of nature, yet its doctrinal differences were far more significant to the actual consolidation of capitalism in both Scotland and England. Whereas Catholicism had elevated the agency of the sacred as a universal force that could open the gates of heaven to all,

¹⁷⁵ Bell, M. (2004), *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology* (2nd ed.), Sage, London, pp.129-132

and Davidson, N., Davidson, N., (2004) 'The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 2: The Capitalist Offensive (1747-1815)', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 4, No.4, October, pp.227-264

¹⁷⁶ Davidson, N., (2004) 'The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 2: The Capitalist Offensive (1747-1815)', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 4, No.4, October, p. 232

Protestantism asserted predestination as a precursor to admission. That is, in its Calvinist form, Protestantism specified that only the “elect” would find a place in heaven. Importantly, the best indicator of one’s likely admission to heaven was the degree to which one registered moral uprightness through hard work and asceticism. Unlike the Catholic doctrine of forgiveness and redemption, where salvation could be bought through indulgences, Protestantism inculcated a moral anxiety in its adherents, one that could only be assuaged by hope and toil. The general effect of this doctrine led directly to the elevation of work, to the degree that labour processes became increasingly efficient, rational and geared for market-based economies. Whereas Catholicism had traded on a patronage that supported its attendant internal hierarchies, Protestantism’s moral compass showed the way toward personal responsibility through work and capital accumulation. In effect, Protestantism occupied the world and moulded it through direct economic engagement; Catholicism, by contrast, accumulated wealth through marketing ‘divine’ imperatives which were articulated by the ordained, human face of God¹⁷⁷.

At the most general level religion played a pivotal role throughout the long feudal epoch, yet it was the more specific variant of Protestantism that contributed much to its final dispatch. In its relation to capitalism, Protestantism developed a doctrine that dislodged old relations of production and fed significant shifts in the ways that human beings structured their relations with environments. The legacy of its influence on the capitalist enterprise is significant. Writing of the period, Bell notes:

...modern capitalism is spreading well beyond ...dominantly Protestant and Christian countries...Religion is no longer the driving force. The capitalist spirit steadily enfolds country after country into its secularized ethic of ascetic rationalism. Economic structures have taken over from Martin Luther and John Calvin in spreading this spirit, even as this spirit dialogically propels the structures, as in the way hard work speeds the treadmill faster and faster¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁷ Bell, M.M. (2004) *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology* (2nd ed.), Sage, London pp.129-131

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 131

Recalibrating Relations: State, Science, Land and Markets

In turning to the significant impacts that came with this final resolution between church and state, transformations in the physical-natural environment became far more critical than they had hitherto been. Whereas agricultural production that had developed gradually over a period of several centuries had been 'associated with the enclosures and the growing centrality of market relations ...(along with) technical changes and livestock management'¹⁷⁹, the period between the 17th and 18th centuries saw a full blown revolution that played itself out over a far shorter time frame. In alignment with the circulation of money as a medium of exchange and the imperative of capital accumulation, the intensification of agricultural production during the period between 1830 and 1880 saw a mass reworking of the land. Such was the scale of this trend that the depletion of soil fertility led directly to an immediate solution - the extensive and ongoing importation of fertilizers. As Foster notes:

In the 1820's and 1830's in Britain, and shortly afterwards in other developing capitalist economies of Europe and North America, widespread concerns about "soil exhaustion" led to a phenomenal increase in the demand for fertilizer. The value of bone imports to Britain increased from £14,400 in 1823 to £254,600 in 1837. The first boat carrying Peruvian guano (the accumulated dung of sea birds) unloaded its cargo in Liverpool in 1835; by 1841, 1,700 tons were imported, and by 1847, 220,000.¹⁸⁰

With pressure mounting to increase crop yields, the application of organic chemistry was brought to bear. Led by Justus von Liebig, the role of soil nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) in relation to the growth of plants led to a reworking of agriculture itself. Importantly, this new knowledge prefigured the production of phosphates on an industrial scale. Led largely by Liebig's work, 'J.B. Lawes, a wealthy English landowner and agronomist, invented a means of making phosphate soluble, enabling him to introduce the first artificial fertiliser, and in 1843, he built a factory for the production of his new "superphosphates"'¹⁸¹.

These advances occurred none to soon; by the 1860's, supplies of Peruvian guano – a primary source of phosphates - had been exhausted. Lawes'

¹⁷⁹ Foster, J.B. (1999) 'Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations of Environmental Sociology', *American Journal of Sociology*, 105, No. 2, pp. 373-4

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 375-376

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.376

entrepreneurialism appeared to have solved part of the problem, but the same could not be said for the acquisition of sufficient supplies of nitrogen fertilizer. In fact, it was not until 1913 that synthetic nitrogen fertilizer would be produced¹⁸².

Stepping back from the more empirical detail of these developments in agriculture, Foster isolates some of the more general and enduring forces that arose during the period:

The second agricultural revolution [from 1830-1880], associated with the application of scientific chemistry to agriculture, was...a period of intense contradictions. The decline in the *natural* fertility of the soil due to the disruption of the soil nutrient cycle, the expanding scientific knowledge of the need for specific soil nutrients, and the simultaneous limitations in the supply of both natural and synthetic fertilisers, all served to generate serious and future concerns about future soil fertility under capitalist agriculture¹⁸³.

In an extensive commentary delivered in 1859, Liebig calls into question the overarching material and social conditions that lead not only to “exhaustion of the soil”, but just as importantly, the impoverishment of populations generally¹⁸⁴. In effect, the nineteenth century was one in which both social and environmental degradation became a motif of capitalist development. Yet the spread and dispersal of capitalist relations was neither even nor uniform.

Combined and Uneven Development: Installing Relations of Power

Many contemporary narratives regarding the transition from feudalism to capitalism tend toward generalities, yet the more specific territorial variants that unfolded during the late medieval period set the scene for disparate development, both within England and Europe, and beyond, in the new world. In and of themselves, these disparities are not necessarily significant. Indeed, they tend to dissipate in circumstances where various national transitions to a capitalist mode of production were synchronised. What is significant is the fact that in some cases, the transformation from a feudal to a capitalist mode of production occurred much later than it did within the more advanced territories. The net effect of this temporal disjuncture was the opening up of extensive opportunities for established capitalist states to steer

¹⁸² *ibid.*, pp. 377- 8

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p.377

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.378

the fortunes of their less advanced neighbours, to the degree that new and complimentary relations were brokered in an environment of compromise and control.

In addition to the power exerted by the more developed territories over the less, the character and membership of landowning classes *per se* became a critical feature of the cultural hue of early capitalism. Even where one country exerted force over another through internal colonisation and exploitation of the commons, the dominant country's capitalist class more usually provided broad support for their less developed cohorts. Critically, and in many cases, this process facilitated *the transmission of relations, values and 'membership'* from the colonising into newly colonised nations and their pre-existing class systems.

Much is rightly made of both the necessary and sufficient conditions to establish capitalist forces and relations of production, yet less well scrutinised is the relationship between capitalist classes themselves. Tensions notwithstanding, this relationship is itself critical to a deeper understanding of the forces that shaped not only the late medieval transition(s) from feudalism to capitalism, but also the transmission of 'capitalist values'¹⁸⁵ into the colonised territories of an expanding, market-based economic order.

In combination with intra-capitalist relations, and often times underscoring them, religion and its relation to capitalism emerges as a cornerstone of institutional legitimation. That is to say, embedded dogmas carried through religious authority combined with the reach of monarchs and peers to control and contain the communal populations upon which capitalism *and* religion would rely during the genesis and later consolidation of this transformation. Indeed, these disparate rates of development, along with the importance of religion as a critical ingredient in the chemistry of this change process, find their full effect in the differential between England and Scotland.

¹⁸⁵ I avoid here the more usual rendering of these values as ideologies because there is little evidence to suggest that all of the institutional structures inimical to 'ideology' were functionally in place.

The Case of Scotland

One of the critical differences that applied between Scotland and England was the fact that '(t)he introduction of capitalist agriculture was so long delayed in the Highlands that the process was concentrated into a much shorter timescale than the original English pattern of enclosure and eviction.'¹⁸⁶ Indeed, the lords had for some four centuries maintained rights and tenure in land and its uses. As a consequence, the clearances not only constituted a far more accelerated and brutal force, they occurred at a 'different time in the historical development of capitalism'. That is, the period between 1760 and 1860, with the majority reaching a peak in the 1850's¹⁸⁷.

The historical backdrop to this rapid transformation rested with the combined effects of feudal agriculture that had been locked into a cycle of static growth, along with restricted improvement to the land and seasonal crop failures. In effect, these drivers led to a reconfiguration of both agricultural production and farming¹⁸⁸, resulting in an expropriation process that rested on the need to extend the reach of the lords as they confronted their collective future. Theirs was a world in which they had been left behind as commodity production had already replaced feudal agriculture in England. Market-based economic activity that characterised early modern capitalism in England clearly exposed the limits and constraints of feudal relations at home. Davidson locates these significant transitional shifts in England, flagging them as necessary precursors in Scotland's transition to capitalism:

...(B)etween the mid-fifteenth century and the late seventeenth century, increases in productivity ceased to be generated by the feudal system itself, but instead by those still subordinate but by now expanding sectors based on commodity production, and consequently on money as a medium of exchange.¹⁸⁹

In large part because of these combined forces, there arose a clear imperative to replace less profitable agrarian production with plantations, along with sheep and cattle farming. One of the keys to the eventual success of this project lay in the structure of the landowning class itself. Historically forged

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 228

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 228

¹⁸⁸ Davidson, N., (2004) 'The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 2: The Capitalist Offensive (1747-1815)', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 4, No.4, October, pp. 232pp. 231-233

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 231-232

through the Union of the Crowns in 1603 (which brought Scotland into the sovereign domain of Great Britain) a Scottish peerage was instituted in alignment, yet not in proportion to its English counterpart. England, with a population of about 5 million, and Scotland with a population of about 1 million both held between 50 and 60 peerages. By 1707, at the Union of Parliaments, '...there were 154 peers in Scotland and 168 peers in England'. In Scotland the descending order of the peerage consisted of '...10 dukes, 3 marquises, 17 viscounts and 49 lords'¹⁹⁰.

It is significant in the case of Scotland that the reach of the peerage was extended through patronage. In the case of the tenth Earl of Argyll (Archibald Campbell), when he was created a Duke 'the territory from which the family drew their feudal rents grew fourfold in size to over 500 square miles'¹⁹¹ and whilst he is regarded as an exemplar of this process, it is no less emblematic of the period that this situation prevailed for most of the peerage, more usually and collectively referred to as the lords. As a ruling class operative in the Scottish countryside they constituted the entire nobility of dukes, barons, and non-baronial lords and exercised jurisdiction through their peerage. Beneath them in the hierarchy was the lairds, 'of whom there were about 1500...Like the English gentry, they were not a class but an estate whose representatives sat in the Scottish Parliament'. The defining characteristic of the lords was that they secured their wealth in the form of feudal rent:

The majority of the lords were uninterested in orientating themselves toward market relations, since this would have meant undertaking long-term investment to which few could afford to commit themselves. Particularly when the results would have been slow in making themselves felt. They were more concerned with maintaining a stable level of income and the social power that came from their particular form of proprietorship. A conspicuous display of social position, not an ascetic commitment to capital accumulation, was the mark of a great man in the seventeenth or early eighteenth century Scotland¹⁹².

This complacency had endured for centuries, yet it was about to face its penultimate test. In 1695 the Scottish harvest failed, to the degree that the whole country faced a famine¹⁹³. As a result, tenants not only failed to subsist, but just as importantly, they could not pay their rents. In the majority of cases

¹⁹⁰ Davidson, *ibid.*, 232

¹⁹¹ Davidson, *ibid.*, 233

¹⁹² *ibid.*, 223

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 247

they became landless labourers and fled to the lowlands in search of work in the manufacturing and mining industries. However, so great was the influx of families that the period 1695-1700 saw population loss due to starvation and disease between 5 and 15% – somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 people¹⁹⁴.

The intervening period between the famine and the recovery that was to follow was characterised by a resistance to change in feudal relations on the part of the lords, and the final Jacobite Uprising of 1745 led a swift transformation in the class structure of Scotland. After successive attempts in 1708 and 1715 by James II, Charles Stuart, his grandson, made a final yet abortive attempt to assert the Stuart succession to the throne. Forced to flee after the defeat of his army at Culloden in 1746, Bonnie Prince Charlie left the Scottish lords to face a succession of acts and proclamations that completely upended the privilege that they had hitherto enjoyed in their landholdings. The removal of these 'extra-economic' powers was invested with an underlying imperative: to destroy the Jacobite social base of Scotland, and with it any further challenge to Protestantism and the state.

Significant amongst these legislative reforms was the Disarming Act of 1746; it not only forbade the possession of arms, but also demanded sworn loyalty to George II in the context of preaching and teaching, which would hereinafter be Protestant. In 1747 the Heritable Jurisdictions Act took effect. Implied by its full title: 'An Act for taking away and abolishing the heritable Jurisdictions in that part of Great Britain called Scotland...and for rendering the Union of the Two Kingdoms more complete'¹⁹⁵ – is an end to the private, hereditary and unalienable rights to lands granted under the Crown, as well as the right to conduct court hearings and impose penalties and fines with regard to offences committed on those lands. As Davidson notes, '...in some cases the state went beyond merely abolishing the powers of the lords and directly took control of their lands...' In 1752 thirteen of the largest estates of Highland Jacobite lords were grouped together under the Annexing Act. Centrally managed, these estates were used to generate profit to

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 247

¹⁹⁵ Davidson, N., (2004) 'The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 2: The Capitalist Offensive (1747-1815)', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 4, No.4, October, pp.418-419

promote... 'the Protestant Religion, good government, industry and manufactures, and the principle of duty and loyalty to his Majesty'¹⁹⁶.

For the lords, the various crises that they confronted towards the end of the eighteenth century arose from their reluctance to install the relations of production necessary to the transformation of their lands. Effectively, the arrangements to which they had remained so attached became the vehicle of their own demise, especially with regard to the emergence of capitalism in England and the lowlands. Driven by the marked losses and limits that they confronted with regard to their landholdings, they were pushed into a process of 'commercialisation' and 'improvement'.

In both England and Scotland the architecture of these reforms had a more grounded register that was to play out in two quite distinct yet interrelated ways. In the first instance, the eighteenth century saw the rise of both a working class and an underclass. In combination, landless labourers and the urban poor constituted such a high proportion of the overall population that the physical domain of elites was being progressively infiltrated. Indeed, as their numbers swelled, so too burgeoning crime rates in cities and towns. With prisons breaching capacity and threats to property at a peak, a solution had to be found; it came in the form of transportation to what would become a colonized New World.

In the second instance, and during the period in which settler colonies were being established, England embraced science as an integral feature of progress. Courtesy of the Enlightenment, the productive intensity of the land moved to the forefront of rational-scientific-economic development, in the process a metabolic rift between humanity and the broader physical environment became a motif of progress that would travel into the two centuries that followed.

The following review situates both colonization and environmental exploitation as distinct yet interrelated features of contemporary development that have their origins in the eighteenth century.

¹⁹⁶ Davidson, op. cit., p.418

To the Colonies...

The Case of Australia

In the England of the mid-eighteenth century about 70% of the total population lived in the countryside, and while it would take another century for the urban population to outnumber the rural, towns and cities were becoming progressively populated by a 'liberated' labour force occupied in factories, mines and mills. Fuelled by the combined force of the industrial revolution, along with the enclosure of feudal lands on which peasants had hitherto subsisted, disease, poverty and high order exploitation became naturalised, with survival mediated by a variety of laws that regulated levels of 'relief'¹⁹⁷.

In England this had been a slowly gathering storm, in large part because the enclosures had taken some three centuries to effect. By contrast, the Scottish clearances were completed in less than a century. Driven to the Lowlands, the Scottish agricultural labour force underwent a far swifter transformation, to the degree that many joined their English counterparts in urban slums further south, thus compounding the problem.

Into this foment an inevitable increase in crime challenged the security and status of Georgian England. With class divisions inscribed on the landscape, East and West London were to become a stark reflection of inequity and misfeasance on the one hand, wealth and privilege on the other. In his extensive coverage of the period, Hughes paints the scene by revisiting the '...two Londons of the 18th century, their separation symbolized by the cleavage that took place as the rich moved their residences westward from Covent Garden between 1700 and 1750... to the new West End... away from the old, rotting East End of the city.'¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ (The) Poor Law: overview <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/poorlaw/plintro.html>

¹⁹⁸ Hughes, R (1987), *The Fatal Shore* p. 20

Despite the class-based apartheid of the period, poverty and criminality had become incorporate features of social life generally. Compounded by rising birth rates¹⁹⁹, the reach of a new 'criminal class' would inevitably be extended. With prisons overburdened, England looked backward...

Historically, the transportation of English offenders to America had started in 1611 and proceeded until the eve of the Revolution in 1775, during which time thousands of British convicts had met their fate in the plantations of Virginia and the new settlement of Massachusetts. Notwithstanding the defeat of the English on American soil, George III assumed that once the dust had settled in the new nation transportation would resume, thus disgorging the prisons once again. But his assumption was seriously flawed. America had liberated itself and slavery was the order of the day, thus making 'white convict labour an irrelevance'²⁰⁰. Indeed, on the eve of the War of Independence some 47,000 African slaves had been arriving annually in America – more than had been transported from English jails in the preceding half century²⁰¹.

As congestion in English prisons peaked, and with typhus rampant, a more immediate solution had to be found. It came in the form of the Hulks Act of 1776²⁰². At the time '...the Thames and southern naval ports were dotted with hulks - old troop transports and men-o'-war, their masts and rigging gone, rotting at anchor, but still afloat and theoretically habitable.'²⁰³ As the second-last port in this ever growing storm, the hulks would accommodate all those who had been sentenced to transportation. There they would abide on the foul rivers and waterways of England until such time as an alternative port of destination could be found. In the interim, their labour would be harnessed in the service of the broader population and they would be set to clean up the rivers, starting with the Thames. By this means felons would be 'reclaimed' and England would avail itself of labour power that had hitherto been

¹⁹⁹ The population of England and Wales between 1700 and 1750 had remained static at about 6 million, between 1750 and 1770 the population of London had doubled, escalating to 18million by 1851.

op. cit., p. 25

²⁰⁰ Hughes, R. (1987), *The Fatal Shore*, p. 41

²⁰¹ op. cit. p. 41

²⁰² op. cit., p. 41

²⁰³ op. cit., pp. 41-42

transported - or so the rhetoric went. But the best laid plans are so often set to go awry, and as Hughes notes, '...the convicts jammed on the hulks were no more reclaimed than the Thames was cleansed...(and) by 1790 their number was rising by about one thousand a year.'²⁰⁴

Brokering a more enduring solution took time but its origins lie in the seafaring exploits of James Cook and Joseph Banks, who, in 1768, set off on a voyage to Tahiti. For Cook the remit was to observe and record the transit of Venus in April 1769²⁰⁵, an astrological event that occurred only once every seven years or so and which could best be observed there. The significance of the observation was that it would assist in calculating the distance between Earth and Sun, a feat that England wanted to claim. For Banks, the project was to document the botany of the South Seas, something that had yet to be accomplished and an obvious coup for an aspiring, well connected young man²⁰⁶. Thereafter, the Admiralty set Cook the task of searching for a southern continent that, for the English, had hitherto been illusive²⁰⁷.

In August 1769, the transit of Venus duly observed and documented, they sailed south. By October of the same year, with their bearings distorted for want of accurate navigation, they hit the east coast of New Zealand's north island. There they were confronted by Maoris, who, adorned with facial tattoos and disposed to a more bellicose manner than the Tahitians, they characterised as fierce. As Banks opined: 'I suppose they live intirely on fish, dogs and enemies'²⁰⁸.

Notwithstanding the hostility of the Maoris, by the end of March 1770 Cook had charted 2,400 miles of New Zealand's coastline. Resigning himself to the fact that the great southern continent did not in fact exist, he decided to head back to England. Of the two routes he could have chosen the more usual

²⁰⁴ op. cit., p. 42

²⁰⁵ op. cit., p. 50

²⁰⁶ op. cit. pp. 51-53

²⁰⁷ Discovered by the Dutch in varying degrees during the early 17th century, Australia had been sighted and occasionally landed by merchant ships plying their trade south of the Spice Islands. Sailing past the west coast of the continent, the sparse barren land was, to the Dutch seafarers, little more than a desert that was unofficially named New Holland. See, Keneally, T. (2010), op. cit., pp. 8-11

²⁰⁸ op. cit., p. 52

eastward passage around Cape Horn would take their ship, the *Endeavour*, into the path of violent winter storms. In choosing the westerly route around the Cape of Good Hope there would be less threat to life and limb. Importantly, the westerly route would also furnish Cook with an opportunity to try and find the coast of Van Dieman's Land²⁰⁹ and see whether it was joined to a larger continental land mass²¹⁰. However, he again lost his bearings and instead of landing on the coast of Tasmania, encountered what would become Cape Everard in Victoria. Flat, sandy and far removed from the lush vegetation of New Zealand, Cook did not land. Instead he coasted north and on April 28, 1770 sailed into Botany Bay.

As the navigation of the continent got underway Cook and his crew would, on August 21 1770, land on an outcrop west of Cape York (Possession Island), hoist a Union Jack and, in the name of George III, formally claim the whole east coast south of where they stood as New South Wales.²¹¹

For Cook, New South Wales was as distinctly different to the English landscape as Moon is to Earth. Populated by 'natives' who were, by turns, aggressive and curious, the terrain, along with the flora and fauna, did not bode well for a future settlement. As a consequence, the *Endeavour* made its way home, arriving in July 1771²¹².

The England to which Cook and Banks returned remained disinterested in the prospect of settlement in Australia until 1783, when Pitt the Younger became Prime Minister. At the time England's prisons and Hulks were in crisis and while alternative sites for the transportation of convicts had been canvassed, it was Botany Bay that eventually emerged as the preferred port of destination. Accordingly, in August 1786 Cabinet was presented with a "Heads of a Plan for effectually disposing of convicts", which proposed that the new colony would serve as "...a remedy for the evils likely to result from

²⁰⁹ Tasmania

²¹⁰ op. cit., pp. 52-53; Discovered by Abel Tasman in 1642, Van Dieman's Land had been named after Viceroy Van Dieman, governor of Batavia, and a critical link in the chain of Dutch explorations throughout the 17th century. See Keneally, T. (2010), *Australians – Origins to Eureka*, Allen and Unwin, NSW

²¹¹ This claim extended to 30 degrees south. See Hughes (1987), p.55 This claim extended to 30 degrees south. See Hughes (1987), p.55

²¹² Hughes (1987), p. 56

the late alarming and numerous increase of felons in this country, and more particularly in the metropolis.”²¹³ A perceived additional benefit at the time was the prospect of harvesting raw materials to service British fleets in India – in particular, timber and flax from Norfolk Island.

Accordingly, on October 12, 1786 Captain Arthur Phillip received his commission from George III and duly become the first Governor of New South Wales. By May 1787, 736 male and female convicts were embarked and the First Fleet was on its way to establish the new colony²¹⁴.

Landing in Botany Bay in January 1788, this initial foray into Australian waters heralded the influx that would follow. In its three-phase roll out, the colonization of New South Wales would begin with ‘primitive’ transportation from 1787 to 1810, involving about 9,300 men and 2,500 women. The Second Fleet, arriving in 1811, prefigured an increased rate of transportation until 1830, dispatching some 50,200 people. Finally, the Third Fleet arrived in 1831, and during the period until 1840 settled about 51,200 convicts, when things changed dramatically. In that year, amidst mounting demands to release the new colony from unending transportation as a means of colonization, NSW got its way and transportation ceased. Because of this decision only 3.2% of the total population of NSW was comprised of convicts²¹⁵.

Transportation had successfully rid English soil of its rabble for decades, and the decision to make NSW a place of ‘free’ settlement compromised the outward flow of felons. With Van Dieman’s Land available and less well settled than NSW, an obvious solution presented itself. As a consequence, from 1841 until 1850, 26,000 convicts were dumped on an island where they constituted some 34.4% of the population. With conditions intolerably harsh in Van Dieman’s Land, a complete breakdown of the system ensued and by 1853 transportation to Tasmania ceased²¹⁶.

²¹³ Hughes, R. (1987), p. 66

²¹⁴ op. cit., pp. 66-72

²¹⁵ op. cit., pp. 161-162

²¹⁶ op. cit., p. 162

But transportation as a general strategy was not quite at an end, and on the opposite side of the continent the new colony of Western Australia, struggling to establish itself, would make a request for convict labour. With little to attract settlers, this was a place constituted largely by desert and distanced from the rest of the colony by about 4,800 kilometres. As the final place of disembarkation a further 9,700 convicts would meet their fate before transportation came to an end in 1868²¹⁷.

Convicts, Bushrangers and Free Settlers: Boundaries in Transition

Given the complexities that characterised the period from 1788 until the mid-nineteenth century, the colonization of Australia underwent a series of dramatic changes. Notably, the population grew from a stock of convicts and ticket-of-leave men whose sentences had been reduced or discharged. Added to by the wide-ranging exploits of bushrangers – most commonly escaped convicts – were the marines and sundry officers who secured the first decades of New South Wales. Yet numbers were insufficient to sustain the new colony. In particular, it needed industry, agriculture and an enduring labour supply if settlement if it was to succeed. Accordingly, ‘free settlers’ were encouraged to leave British shores and take their chances in a land that promised little of the familiar.

The form that this ‘encouragement’ took was developed by the Colonial Office and classified as the “bounty system”. Instigated in 1837 its purpose was to lure English citizens to settle Australia with cash incentives, promising ‘...£30 to every able-bodied migrant couple under the age of thirty, and £5 to each of their children; single men, sponsored by settlers, were underwritten to the tune of £10 each, and respectable spinsters between the ages of fifteen and thirty (if they came out under the protection of a married couple) got £15.’²¹⁸ As Hughes notes, ‘...before long, 18,000 free immigrants had arrived in New South Wales on the bounty system, and over 40,000 on their own initiative.’²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Hughes, R (1987), p.162

²¹⁸ op. cit., p. 497

²¹⁹ op. cit., p. 497

While the history of this period carried inestimable tensions, the establishment of the continent's geographic boundaries was no less an imperative that demanded attention. Land, labour, 'improvements' and capital accumulation had to be managed and regulated, and with only small sections of the greater land mass explored and mapped, the Crown asserted its sovereignty through a process of geographic delineation. Sequentially, this meant the creation of new states and territories that would be administered according to British Law. As a starting point in the process, the New South Wales of 1788 divided the continent into distinct east and west domains, where only the eastern seaboard constituted a 'known' and named landscape. In 1822 boundaries between east and west were established through the creation of Western Australia, thus dividing the nation in two. In 1836 South Australia was proclaimed, eating into part of the area designated as NSW. By 1851, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and New South Wales shared the land mass, and in 1859 Queensland disrupted the boundaries of NSW. Finally, and after 1911, the country we now know as Australia, was further reconfigured to accommodate the Northern Territory and Tasmania²²⁰.

These critical features of Australia's early development signal the faint echoes of rights in property that came with the enclosures and clearances in England and Scotland. More precisely, land and labour would become the central motif of life in the great southern land, for, transported along with convicts, was the now well established tenet of private ownership. Coupled with social and racial hierarchies, this would constitute the architecture that would shape the way the British Empire would secure its claim to Australia. As to the indigenes who had met Cook, Banks and the Fleets that were to follow - they were viewed through the lens of British imperialism as either nuisance or irrelevance. Characterised as 'nomads' and occasionally hostile to the invading 'white ghosts', they would become the archetypal colonized - a status from which recovery would come slow. Indeed, the place of Australia's *ab original*²²¹ inhabitants still lingers as one in which external invasion would be replicated as a persistent, internal colonization took hold.

²²⁰ Hughes, R (1987), Introductory pages

²²¹ The etymology of *ab origine* dates from the 16th century and has its Latin roots in: 'from the beginning'. See Keneally, T (2010), p. 4 and Collins English Dictionary (3rd edition) (1991), Harper Collins, Sydney, p.4.

and the Colonized...

Throughout the late medieval period, theorizing that asserted the presence of *Australia Terra*²²² was matched only by occasional encounters with a coastline that appeared bland, dry and devoid of any flora or fauna of interest. Occurring more by accident than design, these first visitations extended from the early 17th century until the time of Cook's arrival a century later²²³. Generally, the voyages were hampered by navigation technology that had yet to achieve the accuracy required to chart and replicate explorations. It would not be until 1764, with the invention of the chronometer, followed by the publication of a Nautical Almanac, that accurate navigation could proceed²²⁴.

Yet while English, Spanish and Dutch were plying the trade routes to the north of Australia, for at least a century prior to Cook's arrival on the east coast the indigenes had enjoyed friendly relations with Makassan fishermen²²⁵. Travelling from the port of Ujung Pandang in Sulawesi they had long-established connections with the clans and tribes of northern Australia, particularly the Yolngu of East Arnhem Land. Trade, exchange and intermarriage were to become normalized here, to the degree that indigenous men occasionally travelled to Sulawesi with the Makassans, returning to trade foreign goods with inland clans²²⁶.

²²² In 1598, Dutch Geographer, Cornelius Wyfliet declared '...*Australia Terra* to be the most southern of all lands, separated from New Guinea by a narrow strait. Its shores are hitherto but little known, since one voyage or another that route has been deserted, and seldom is the country visited unless sailors are driven there by storms. The *Australis Terra* begins at 2 or 3 degrees from the Equator, and is maintained by some to be of so great an extent that if it were thoroughly explored it would be regarded as a fifth part of the world'. See Keneally, T. (2010), p. 8

²²³ From the available evidence it appears that encounters with Australia's coastline occurred mainly on the northern and western seaboard. Beginning in about 1421, the Ming Navy maintained a trading post in Indonesia and is said to have landed on the north coast. Thereafter, Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch vessels recorded and variously claimed parts of the continent, including Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania) in 1642. See Keneally, T. (2010), pp. 10-11.

²²⁴ Chronometer and nautical almanac were, in combination, the technologies required to calculate longitude – a vital and precise measurement that assured accurate navigation. The Nautical Almanac was published in 1766, three years prior to Cook's voyage, though Cook did not choose to avail himself of a chronometer, which probably accounts for his miscalculations with regard to the coastline of Van Dieman's Land in 1770. See Hughes, R. (1987), p. 50

²²⁵ The Makassan's came to Australia in search of trepang (sea slug) which was a prized catch, especially in markets throughout Asia. See Keneally, T. (2010), p. 6.

²²⁶ The downside of this long-term interaction manifest in the Yolngu becoming the first (recorded) indigenous tribe to contract smallpox, yaws and venereal disease. They were also the first to have access to firearms, tobacco and alcohol. Notwithstanding the inevitable

Historically, the indigenes of Australia had held an established place on the continent for at least 30,000 years, though on best evidence this period probably extends to about 60,000 years. Dispersed throughout inland deserts, coastal plains, mountain ranges and tropical forests their number was estimated to be about 300,000 when the first fleet arrived in 1788²²⁷. While the 500 or so tribes that occupied the landscape held no notion of private property, they were none the less territorial. With ties to land ('country') delineated by common ancestry, hunting and totemic customs underscored family and clan ties, as well as distinct languages²²⁸. While there is some evidence of inter-tribal conflict, the generally shared relation to the physical environment kept things in a state of relative balance.

To the untrained English eye, shelter was both arbitrary and temporary, yet it was consistently constituted by places known to provide water and food, with movement across tribal lands predicated on seasons that delineated climatic rhythms and environmental conditions²²⁹. In what is now Sydney, the Eora tribe who met Cook, and later Arthur Phillip, roamed across an area of about 700 square miles, from Pittwater to Botany Bay. This contrasted sharply with the Gundidjmarra of south-western Victoria, who developed sedentary villages characterised by houses built of stone, timber and turf²³⁰. With a more abundant supply of fish and 'bush' food (edible flora), the need to traverse large tracts of land was mitigated by a more temperate climate and bountiful food supply.

Much is rightly made of the centrality of land in the unfolding colonisation of Australia, yet just as significant was the issue of food. In a new colony where supplies were often bleak, protein was critical; in the case of Van Dieman's Land it was found in the form of the kangaroo. Given the abundance of the animal, it is not surprising that the 'roo constituted a foundational commodity that was marketed for cash.

impacts, the Yolngu retain a positive and inclusive demeanour toward the Makassans, still asserting that 'We are one people'. See Keneally, T. (2010), pp. 6-7

²²⁷ Hughes, R. (1987), op. cit., p.9

²²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 9

²²⁹ Hughes, R. (1987), p. 12

²³⁰ The geology of the region also provided the stone and timbers from which these rudimentary houses were made²³⁰.

Pascoe, B. (2007), pp. 32-33

As Hughes notes:

Kangaroos were plentiful in the bush of Van Dieman's Land – much more so than they had ever been around Sydney. Every able-bodied man who could use a gun went hunting them, for kangaroo flesh, not bread, was the staff of life²³¹.

While Governor Collins attempted to regulate the market, the burgeoning trade escaped all control. For free-settlers the cost of kangaroo ranged from sixpence to one shilling and sixpence per pound, and in one six month period they consumed approximately 15,000 pounds of dressed meat. As a consequence, about 1,000 kangaroo were slaughtered, with the effect that the species disappeared from Hobart during the early years of settlement²³².

As to the social results, reliance on hunting for profit '...installed the gun, rather than the plough, as the totem of survival in Van Dieman's Land'²³³. Settlers generally neglected the cultivation of the land, so rapacious was the pursuit of anything that could be shot for food. Inevitably, the indigenes who had relied on kangaroo as a primary protein source were drawn into direct conflict with white hunters as '...the pattern of murder and ambush between white and black...' became an established feature of day to day life. Within a few decades the Tasmanian Aborigines would be all but exterminated²³⁴.

Further north on the continental mainland, the vagaries of settlement took a somewhat different turn. From 1788 until 1803, Sydney Cove was being established as a settlement under the governorship of Arthur Phillip. More compassionate and attuned to the need for compatible relations, colonization was crafted to accommodate, rather than decimate, the indigenous population. Steered by Royal instruction, Phillip, along with all governors that were to follow until 1822, was charged with upholding their right to pursue customary use of land. Moreover, anyone who actually injured or killed indigenous people did so under threat of prosecution and punishment.

²³¹ *ibid.*, p. 126

²³² Hughes (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 126

²³³ *ibid.*, p. 126

²³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 126

In many respects, early engagements between Empire and Aborigines resonated with historically grounded experience further afield. Unlike the unfolding settlements of America's deep south, the British Empire did not install slavery as a foundational feature of colonization. Indeed, Australian Aborigines were initially accorded full legal status with white settlers. By implication this meant that they had to be met with at least some level of equanimity²³⁵.

But rhetoric and reality proved incompatible as the policy played out around the growing resentment of white convicts. Feeling the sting of demotion in the chain of social legitimacy, these transportees were already galled by their exile and desperately needed to install the idea that there was a class inferior to themselves²³⁶. More to the point, the souring of relations that have their origins in the proclamation of 'black' rights came to constitute one of the more enduring features of Australian settlement. In effect, convicts and settlers alike hated the blacks, and reprisals for indigenous encroachment on the land that these invaders now claimed were swift, excessive and disproportional.

In so far as official policy was concerned, and notwithstanding the gallant intentions of those who remained on English shores, Aborigines were destined to confront their colonizers not through cultural values that they held or understood, but through the imposition of a doctrine that made no comprehensible sense. Its origins lie in a colonial perspective that ascribed to Aborigines a way of life characterised as 'nomadic'. Roaming the countryside in search of food and shelter, these 'natives' were clearly devoid of the will to 'improve' the land and all it contained. Moreover, there was no cash economy and no register of trade – the very conditions that would undergird the evolution of colonial settlement.

Yet despite their free-ranging ways, the indigenes persisted in asserting their territoriality. For the vast majority of British settlers this posture constituted an affront; land was there to be exploited, not left 'un-improved'. Moreover, sedentary settlement constituted the common ground on which colonizer and

²³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 272-273

²³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 94-95

colonized could meet each other. This was particularly evident in the British colonial experience of Virginia, Africa, New Zealand and the East Indies, where sedentary settlement was an *a priori* condition that would be factored into any negotiations with 'natives'. As a general feature of the colonial project prior to Australia:

...British colonists encountered cultures of farming people who had houses, villages and plots of cultivated land. These proofs of prior ownership might be violated by the whites (and often were), but they could not be denied or ignored. Even Charles II instructions to the Council of Foreign Plantations on the conduct of the English colony in Virginia had recognized that as the new settlement would "border upon" the lands of the Indians, their territory had to be respected, for "peace is not to be expected without...justice to them".²³⁷

In all of these places the complimentary relation of territory and property was more clearly established and understood, so much so that it constituted the template that would shape early attempts to 'civilise' Australia's indigenes. For Governor Macquarie, so ingrained was the ethos that settlement of the land rested on its improvement that in 1815 he attempted to wrest 16 aboriginal men from their "rambling Naked state" and turn their labours to farming. The setting was Sydney Harbour and the men were left with huts and a boat to assist their endeavours. But '...they lost the boat, ignored the huts and wandered off into the bush'²³⁸.

Irrespective of the location, this civilizing mission extended to all of Australia's early frontiers and resulted in a series of pitched battles between white and black. Characteristically, Aboriginal incursions during the day were matched by the night-time raids of troopers, convicts and settlers, registering extensive losses on both sides. In the case of Tasmania hostilities reached their apogee during 1830, when Aborigines killed or wounded some 417 colonists.²³⁹ In the Spring of that year Governor Arthur's response was swift as he mobilised an entire community of settlers to meet the formidable threat of the blacks. Exhorted to create a 'Black Line' passed which no indigene could proceed, some 2,200 men were conscripted²⁴⁰.

²³⁷ Hughes, R. (1987) op. cit., p. 273

²³⁸ Hughes (1987), op. cit., p. 273

²³⁹ Clements, N. (2014), *The Black War: Fear, Sex and Resistance in Tasmania*, University of Queensland Press

²⁴⁰ op. cit., pp. 125-154

But this lofty plan failed to account for the underlying knowledge of the land that the indigenes carried with them. In a campaign that was to have taken a month or so, the Black Line grew fainter, and within a couple of months it was declared to have been a failure. As George Augustus Robinson²⁴¹ would observe:

The military operations and armed parties sent out in quest of the hostile natives has frequently been the occasion of much reflection to my mind and the futility of such endeavour has been apparent...The natives have the advantage in every respect, in their sight, hearing, nay, in all their senses; their sense of smelling also. They can smell a smoke at a long distance, especially if the wind sets toward them. I have known instances of their scenting a kangaroo roasting by the hostile natives. They are at home in the woods; the whole country with few exceptions affords them concealment.²⁴²

Notwithstanding the failure of the 'Line', a 'Black War'²⁴³ raged on, with inevitable consequences. Compared to the well-armed campaign of settler colonists, Aboriginal efforts in defence of country constituted no more than guerrilla warfare. The Black Line may have failed to secure its intended outcome in the short term, but the decimation of small indigenous clans was finally effected in December 1831 with the surrender of the Mairrememmenner, last of the tribes to be quelled²⁴⁴.

By 1834 most of Tasmania's remaining Aborigines would be 'transported' to Flinders Island in Bass Strait where they would be subjected to the tutelage of George Augustus Robinson. The aim was more simple-minded than it was simple: to 'Europeanize' the natives and school them in the ways of buying and selling so that they 'might acquire a reverence for property'. Not surprisingly, and 'despite their new clothes, new names, Bibles and elementary schooling ... they simply died'. By 1855 the census of natives in Tasmania recorded three men, two boys and eleven women, one of whom

²⁴¹ In Tasmania, George Augustus Robinson took up the challenge of building relationships between Aborigines and settlers in 1829. At that time he left his family in order to 'fully devote himself to the remnant of this much injured race'. He led a party of Aboriginal envoys on a series of 'friendly missions' between 1830 and 1834 in the hope of establishing conciliation between a range of tribes and settlers. See: Clements, N. (2014), op. cit., p. 7

²⁴² *ibid.*, p. 150

²⁴³ For a full account of the 'Black War' see: Clements, N. (2014), *The Black War: Fear, Sex and Resistance in Tasmania*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia

²⁴⁴ op. cit., p. 177

was Truganini, whose husband died in 1869 – last of the indigenous Tasmanians.²⁴⁵

These accounts of early British incursions into Aboriginal life and land are best understood as *tactical* manoeuvres. Short-term, reactive and usually punitive, there was nothing *strategic* in their formulation or implementation. In the case of Tasmania's 'Black Line', geographic delineation of territory was led by the assumed rights of colonizers to all of the land they surveyed. In the case of western Victoria, a 'convincing ground' was established, with the same effect. There, the Gundidjmarra were roundly dispatched through violent dispossession of their established settlements around Portland - a process designed to 'convince' them that they held no rights to the land that they had occupied for millennia²⁴⁶.

Emblematic of a broader and more pervasive push, rights in land were central features of all conflicts between Aborigines and settlers. Irrespective of the setting, violence and retribution were normalized as consistent features of occupation. The 'Black War' may have been specific to Tasmania, yet it was a campaign that extended throughout colonial Australia, to the degree that it forestalled the formulation of a more strategic 'grand plan' - one that embodied British law and judicial oversight.

What is clear from the documentary evidence of the period is that the mass appropriation of indigenous land was becoming an imperative that had to be addressed if settlement was to endure. In accounting for its evolution we look back to the contribution of Joseph Banks.

Acting as witness before the Commons Committee on Colonies in 1779, Banks was asked for his opinion about the suitability of Botany Bay as a prospective site for transportation. He was one of the few commentators who held direct knowledge of New South Wales. At that time, transportation had yet to be deployed, and so Banks seized the opportunity to extemporise. When asked whether he thought that land for settlement might be acquired from

²⁴⁵ Hughes, R. (1987), op. cit. p. 423

²⁴⁶ See: Pascoe, B (2007), op. cit., pp. 19-20; 93; 95-96

Aborigines by 'Cessation or Purchase' Banks asserted that this would probably not be feasible, largely because 'there was nothing you could give the Aborigines in return for their soil'. He went on to explain that 'the blacks were blithely nomadic and would 'speedily abandon' whatever land was needed²⁴⁷.

Of interest here is the fact that in 1779 'cessation' and 'purchase' constituted two of the pre-existing mechanisms by which Britain could 'acquire' land from indigenes. Implicitly, they held rights in land that could only be transferred thus. Since transportation did not begin until 1788, some nine years later, the issue of land transfer and title deeds were not prominent considerations that evolved into a strategic approach to colonization. Yet notwithstanding the lack of specific interest in land ownership at the time, it appears that the seeds of a new doctrine were planted here, and according to Keneally it was at this point that '...(the) concept of New South Wales as *terra nullius*, no man's land, was born'²⁴⁸.

Formative though it was in 1779, the evolution of this 'land belonging to no-one' rested on a central precept of British law. In particular, 'discovery' and pre-existing 'sovereignty'. In an extensive commentary on the application of British law, Reynolds notes that:

The country was treated as though the Aborigines were neither in occupation of the land nor exercising sovereignty over their territories. The audacious British claim was that they had acquired an original, not a derived sovereignty because there was no other and that the Crown also became the beneficial owner of all the land. Property and sovereignty simply fell into their eager hands. The senior legal advisor to the Colonial Office counselled his minister in 1819 that New South Wales had not been acquired by conquest or treaty but as 'a desert and uninhabited' territory.²⁴⁹

Clearly, the British posture toward land ownership in Australia had transformed from one in which Aborigines were accorded the right to maintain customary use of land, to one driven by the imperatives that evolved with settlement. This is particularly evident when we consider that from its inception as a dumping ground for convicts, Australia drew free

²⁴⁷ Keneally, T. (2010), op. cit., pp.39-40

²⁴⁸ Keneally, T (2010), op. cit. p.40

²⁴⁹ Reynolds, H. (2013), *Forgotten War* University of NSW Press, Sydney, p.163

settlers in a bid to develop a more enduring claim to the continent. In effect, the vigorous contests over land escalated in direct proportion to increasing British migration. Added to this was the place of sheep and cattle as foundational elements of the new colonial economy. As early as 1836 some 500 sheep were off loaded at Point Gellibrand on Port Phillip Bay²⁵⁰. Within the next eight years, 12,000 Europeans would arrive, along with one hundred thousand cattle and half a million sheep²⁵¹. While Port Phillip Bay constitutes just one region of settlement, it is no less emblematic of the rest of the country; the specific orientation of agriculture and farming may have varied across the continent, but the importance of land acquisition did not.

In 1889, the British Privy Council finally confirmed the doctrine of *terra nullius* in colonial law. As with many of the vagaries of settler colonialism, the resolution of land acquisition and title deeds had taken a century to effect. Yet now there was in place a clear and unequivocal statutory control that, in its own way, served to institutionalise the rights of British invaders, not those of customary occupants. In a comprehensive examination of these foundational precepts Patrick Wolfe notes that:

The key concept is that of private property. In distinctively Lockean fashion, the doctrine held that property in land resulted from the mixing of one's labor with it to render it a more efficient provider of wealth than it would have been if left in its natural state...Practically, this meant settled agriculture, involving cultivation, irrigation, and enclosure. In addition to this requirement, it was also necessary that there be a properly sanctioned framework of laws to protect the property rights that the individual had acquired by dint of the application of his (sic) labor. Practically, this meant centralized governance, formal sanctions, and, again, enclosure, or fixed public boundaries. *Within Europe, there could hardly have been a clearer antithesis, not to say challenge, to an unrepresentative system of hereditary landed power characterized by inefficiency and wasteful exclusions.* In its colonial application, where it acquired the formality of a name (*terra nullius* meaning "nobody's land"), the same set of principles furnished a warrant for denying "nomadic" peoples ownership of the land they occupied.²⁵²
[Emphasis added]

While the application of *terra nullius* was not universally accepted by some of the more enlightened settlers, the fact remains that it spurred the majority on

²⁵⁰ Pascoe, B. (2007), op. cit., p. 5

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 25

²⁵² Wolfe, P. (2001), "Land, Labour and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (June 2001), pp866-905. See p. 869

to claim, settle, cultivate and farm on a scale that could never have been imagined by Aborigines. Effectively, what the English enclosures and Scottish clearances had done for the United Kingdom, *terra nullius* did for Australia. More than this, however, it laid the foundations for a national culture characterized by dis-regard and dis-respect. In its evolution, violent dispossession was matched by the hubris of evangelical Christianity as a culture of oppression and racism took hold. Writing of the three phases of settler colonialism, Wolfe notes that ‘...confrontation, carceration (which includes removal), and assimilation (biological and cultural)’... characterized the project of settlement.

Aborigines who survived the disaster of the first phase found themselves reduced to improvising whatever livelihoods they could in the pores of the alien new society, which generally found them repugnant. Measures were introduced to confine the surviving Aboriginal "remnant" to fixed locations, either by the lure of rations or by coercive measures. This constitutes the second, carceral phase of settler-colonial policy toward Aborigines. In keeping with Social Darwinist premises, as corroborated by Aborigines' manifest decimation, their confinement on missions and reserves was seen as a temporary measure, since they were believed to be a dying race. Although framed in philanthropic rhetoric (as in missionaries "smoothing the dying pillow"), this phase maintained the logic of elimination in that it vacated Aboriginal territory and rendered it available for pastoral settlement... Although the final phase, assimilation, was governed by a discourse of miscegenation, it was consistent with - and, in its own way, reproduced - the same logic of elimination that had underlain the first two phases. Thus the assimilation policy should be situated in the historical context of Australian colonization as a whole²⁵³.

At the most general level, these phases of colonization gave form to the various policies through which they were enacted. As endemic and enduring features of Australia's emergence as a nation state they also varied in time and place. For example, regional difference gave rise to European reliance on indigenous labour, particularly in the case of the northern cattle industry. Quite apart from the fact that Europeans were unused to climatic conditions that prevailed in the north of the continent, cheap white labour was largely unavailable. As a consequence, Aboriginal stockmen proved critical to what became a key national industry. Further afield, men of the Torres Strait were ‘employed’ as divers on pearl luggers²⁵⁴ in the north-west of the continent.

²⁵³ Wolfe, P. (2001), op. cit., pp. 871-872

²⁵⁴ Wolfe, P. (2001), op. cit., p. 876

Less well known was the fate of Aboriginal women who were similarly exploited in sealing and oyster diving in the early days of settlement in Tasmania. With regard to the generalizable impacts of colonization, Wolfe notes that:

Aboriginal men and women were in many respects differently colonized, with women's domestic and sexual labor being valued on a different scale to their men's services. Although these and other variations are significant and need to be acknowledged, they do not alter the primacy of the dominant pattern, manifest most clearly in the south and east of the continent, where settler colonialism practically approximated its pure or theoretical form, resulting, within a short space of time, in the decimation of the Aboriginal population.²⁵⁵

As the new colony grew and evolved into a federated Australia, little of its grounding ethos and ideology was eroded. Indeed, the struggle for indigenous rights in land, along with the ongoing challenges to fundamental human rights, were so slow to find effect that it was not until 1963 that any indigenous tribe would challenge the doctrine of *terra nullius*. In that year, the Yolgnu of Yirrkala delivered a bark petition to the Federal House of Representatives outlining their grievances in relation to the excision of land from an Aboriginal Reserve in East Arnhem Land. Earlier that year, and without reference to or consultation with the Yolgnu people, the Federal Government had removed land from their designated indigenous Reserve to facilitate bauxite mining. As a result of the petition, a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry was established and it delivered a finding that acknowledged Yolgnu occupancy and land-use, along with sacred sites. The Committee recommended compensation and the protection of sacred sites, as well as ongoing monitoring of the situation at Yirrkala.

Notwithstanding this decision, it would take a further eight years for the first native title claim to find its way before a court of law. In 1971 the Yolgnu challenged the validity of the bauxite mining leases granted by the Crown in Arnhem Land. In what became known as the *Gove land rights case*²⁵⁶ this constituted the first litigated native title claim in Australia. Heard before the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, the Yolgnu argued that rights in land held by indigenous communities under their law and customs had

²⁵⁵ Wolfe, P (2001), op. cit., p. 871

²⁵⁶ *Milirrpum v Nabalco Pty Ltd* (1971) 17 FLR 141 (NTSC)

survived the acquisition of sovereignty, unless validly terminated by the Crown. The significance of the legal dimension of this argument lay in the 1963 Committee findings that indigenous communities had a recognizable system of law involving a relationship with the land. Yet despite this, the application was dismissed on the basis that the doctrine of communal native title never formed part of Australian law and, if it did, then Yolgnu native title was extinguished by opening the land for grant to colonial settlers. Accordingly, in 1971 ‘...Justice Blackburn concluded that Aborigines belonged to the land, but the land did not belong to them. Since Australia belonged to no one else, it was simply there for Europeans to take, without the requirement for contract, compensation, or other form of consideration that the acknowledgement of so-called ‘Native Title’ would have imposed’²⁵⁷.

During this period, the engagement of indigenous communities in land rights began to escalate and the state government of Queensland faced challenges on a broader scale. On May 20, 1982 Eddie Koiki Mabo and four other Murray Islanders lodged a statement of claim in the High Court, asserting ‘native title’ over Mer (Murray Island) in the Torres Strait. Typically, the process took time to find its way to the High Court, yet time enough for the Queensland Government to pre-empt the litigation by enacting the *Queensland Coast Islands Declaratory Act 1985* (Queensland), which extinguished any native title that might exist in the Torres Strait, without compensation.

Given this legal sleight of hand, in 1986 the High Court remitted the case back to the Queensland Supreme Court for a trial on the facts. But Mabo pressed on with a challenge to the legitimacy of Queensland’s maneuvering, testing the matter before the High Court once again. Accordingly, in 1988 *Mabo v Queensland (No 1)*,¹¹ the High Court found the Queensland Coast Islands Declaratory Act to be inconsistent with the Racial Discrimination Act and therefore invalid. As a result, the original proceedings concerning the native title claim were permitted to continue and in June 1992, the Australian High Court recognized the ‘prior’ claim of the Meriam people to their customary lands.

²⁵⁷ See: *Native Title Timeline*, Indigenous Law Centre, Faculty of Law, UNSW www.ilc.unsw.edu.au and, Wolfe, P. (2001), op. cit. p. 871

The battle had been hard won and had taken over a decade and sadly, Eddie Mabo had died earlier in the year. Yet there was a mood of optimism about indigenous futures, and the 'Mabo decision', as it became known, still lingers as one of the most critical legal victories in recent indigenous history²⁵⁸.

Since that time there have been many transformations to land, occupancy and ownership, but the underlying attitudes that shaped the bleak history of settlement have been foundational in the crafting of Australia's nationhood. Measured in fact, rather than popular myth, they continue to register in high indigenous rates of preventable disease, poor housing, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to the range of support services that non-indigenous Australians enjoy²⁵⁹. Not helped by the selective 'histories' marketed by conservative academics and commentators, colonization, settlement and indigenous dispossession constitute some of the most contentious features of the national story. Effectively whitewashed out of the collective memory, the extent and depth of violent dispossession has been dispatched by some of the more notable proponents of its demise. Amongst their number is Keith Windshuttle, who, in 2002, published *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Dieman's Land 1803 - 1847*²⁶⁰. Implied by the title, Windshuttle delivers a 'history' based solely on the premise that Tasmania's Aborigines were 'thuggish' criminals who brought about their own demise. More than this, '...their mere existence owed more to good fortune than good management'²⁶¹.

²⁵⁸ On 3 June, 1992, in *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)*, 12 the High Court recognized native title as a common law property right, rejecting the doctrine of *terra nullius*. The High Court declared that, subject to any acts of extinguishment, the Meriam people are 'entitled as against the whole world, to possession, occupation, use and enjoyment of the island of Mer', an exclusive possession form of native title. See: Australian Bureau of Statistics

<http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/1301.0Feature%20Article21995?opendocument>; and, Indigenous Law Centre: Native Title Timeline <file:///E:/Mabo%20Decision/Native%20Native%20Timeline%201788-2012.pdf>

²⁵⁹ Trachoma has been eradicated in all developed countries except Australia. See: Taylor, H.R., (2001) 'Trachoma in Australia', *Medical Journal of Australia*, 175 (7): pp. 371-372; Life expectancy for indigenous males: 67.2 years; non-indigenous males: 78.7 years. Indigenous females: 72.9 years; non-indigenous females: 82.6 years

See: ABS (2009a) *Experimental Life Tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Australians, 2005-2007*, Cat. no. 3302.0.55.003, ABS, Canberra.

²⁶⁰ Windshuttle, K. (2002), *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Dieman's Land*, Macleay Press, Sydney

²⁶¹ Clements, N. (2014), op. cit., p. 6

In sharp contrast with Windshuttle's questionable history of the period is the work of Reynolds²⁶² and Clements²⁶³, both of whom apply critical diligence in their coverage of Australia's 'Black War'. As they note, this was an enduring, violent campaign that raged throughout the nineteenth century – one that became a 'forgotten war'. More than this, its fragile place in the collective memory signals the enduring presence of an underlying divide between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Land may have been the original vehicle through which this schism developed, yet it is both symbolic and symptomatic of the lack of will that characterized a host of government policies that were imposed and inflicted upon *ab original* people well into the third millennium²⁶⁴.

In so far as this work is concerned with *community* sustainability, and given the resonance of our histories in the contemporary present, the evolution of British Imperialism must be understood as a process that carried the very relations of power that would limit the sustainability of both people and place. Indeed, those limits to 'sustainability' are best expressed in the ways that social, cultural and environmental aspects of life were colonized through the establishment of race, gender and class-based hierarchies directly matched to 'ownership' of land. Despite the more recent success of indigenous claims to rights in that land, the grand plan, it seems, has been one in which *divisions* continue to express the victory of the colonial project. In their way they constitute an end game that lingers two centuries later, particularly in the absence of indigenous inclusion in Australia's constitution.

In many respects, the dispatch of feudal relations in England and Scotland had similar consequences for most of the peasantry. Not unlike their indigenous counterparts, they were, in their way, colonized and dispatched. Where Aborigines were all but hunted down and killed, they were transported for 'crimes' that arose from the very conditions under which most lived. In both cases, the mixing of labour and land to produce 'improvements' was a critical driver. Yet while the colony of New South Wales was establishing itself as an unbounded 'farm', the smaller geographic home of

²⁶² Reynolds, H. (2013), *The Forgotten War*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney

²⁶³ Clements, N. (2014), op. cit. p. 4-5

²⁶⁴ Notable among them are the miscegenation and assimilation policies of the mid-twentieth century. See Wolfe, P. (2001), op. cit., p. 872

Empire labored to install farming and agricultural production as the cornerstone of 'commercialization'. Led by science and its attendant new technologies, the mediating influence of Enlightenment thinkers combined to extend the fractured relations between people and the physical environments that they occupied. Where once feudal agriculture had, by its very nature, forged direct ties to land, there now arose a relational reordering of humanity and its environs. Underscored by the intensive exploitation of broader environments through agriculture, forestry, mining and manufacture, human-environmental relations were transformed to such a degree that rapidly urbanizing industrial cities and towns, along with the populations that occupied them, soon came to carry registers of embedded environmental degradation as a norm – notably, the excessive pollution of waterways, poor infrastructure, drainage and sanitation, along with hunger, communicable disease and overcrowding²⁶⁵.

In turning to the consequences of these 'advances', the following review outlines some of the more critical impacts that came with 'improvements' to the productivity of the land.

²⁶⁵ Foster, J.B. (1999) 'Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations for Environmental Sociology', *American Journal of Sociology*, **105** No. 2, pp. 377-388

A Metabolic Rift Develops

Science and its Stagings: The foundations of 'progress' are laid

During the period when the colony of New South Wales grappled with the challenge of food production and dispossessed 'natives', science took hold in the motherland. Spurred by the Enlightenment (more particularly, the Scottish Enlightenment) and its direct engagement with the improvement of the land²⁶⁶, Scotland entered into a process of rapid 'commercialisation'. Indeed, and despite the fact that feudalism had endured far longer in Scotland than it had in England, the transformation from feudalism to capitalism in Scotland would be accelerated with such effect that it would become a model for development, one articulated through the fusion of intellectual elites and burgeoning academic specialisations (disciplines)²⁶⁷.

In the case of Scotland, combined and uneven development emerges as a critical feature of that process. Characterised by internal colonisation on the one hand, and the imperative of capitalist development on the other, Scotland was able to assert its place in what would become a new world order. Far from being left behind because of its tardiness in dispatching old feudal relations, Scotland forged ahead.

In referencing some of the central precepts of classical Marxism, Davidson notes that '...in relation to advanced countries ...the backward are neither condemned to repeat their experience, nor to find their progress blocked by them, but under certain conditions (can) adopt their technological, organizational and intellectual achievements to different effect.' Yet that said, the 'downside of this process not infrequently debases the achievements borrowed from outside in the process of adapting them to its own more primitive culture'²⁶⁸. This was certainly true of the Scottish case. In particular, the coal industry, where advanced English and Flemish technologies were operated not by men who were free to sell their labour, but rather by those who remained legally enserfed.

²⁶⁶ Davidson, N., (2005) 'The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 3: The Enlightenment as the Theory and Practice of Improvement', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 5, No.1, pp.1-72

²⁶⁷ Davidson, N., (2005) 'The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 3: The Enlightenment as the Theory and Practice of Improvement', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 5, No.1, pp.1-72

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 415-416

The effects of combined and uneven development manifest in a range of ways, yet the starkest register between England and Scotland was the way in which the transition to capitalism took place. Unlike the drawn out process that applied to England, the Scottish embrace of capitalism was 'systematically theorized in advance of its implementation', rather than arising from the long-term, partial and evolving realizations that accompanied its emergence in England. This effectively saw an intensification in the rate and orientation of 'development', to the degree that social-material degradation became normative. This was evidenced by two features of Scotland's transformation. Firstly, the conversion of agricultural land to pasture fed the development of sheep and cattle industries. Essential to the process of primary accumulation, the yield from these 'improvements' more than justified the conversion of agricultural lands. Secondly, the decimation of Scotland's native forests came as a consequence of the commercial felling that developed throughout the industrial revolution. The result of this process culminated in a 'wet desert', where native species now cover just 1% of Scotland's land mass²⁶⁹.

The Scottish Enlightenment, far from being a mere reflection or echo of its counterpart in England and Europe, played a critical role here - one driven by and invested with a two-fold brief. Specifically, it claimed a unique place in the transformation of Scotland through its scholarly turn to economic theory, along with practical applications that would produce an actual *improvement* in agrarian production. That is, political economy as *theory* would inform *improvement* as practice²⁷⁰. Driven by the need of the intellectual elites to find a place in a world in which commodity production was fast replacing feudal agricultural production, the market-based economic activity that came to characterise modern capitalism was absorbed into their brief.

The Scottish Enlightenment was bourgeois and capitalist in terms of its class basis, and consequently Scottish political economy was revolutionary in content, in that one of its aims was to transform social relations in the countryside. Political economy indicated both the end ('commercial society') and the means by which it could be achieved ('improvement').²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ McIntosh, A., (2004), *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power*, Arum Press, London, p.78

²⁷⁰ See: Davidson, N., (2005) "'The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 3: The Enlightenment as the Theory and Practice of Improvement', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 5, No.1, pp.21-22

²⁷¹ Davidson, N., (2005) "'The Scottish Path to Capitalist Agriculture 3: The Enlightenment as the Theory and Practice of Improvement', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 5, No.1, p. 22

In effect, the European and Scottish Enlightenment of the 18thth and 19thth centuries constituted an epoch where the beliefs, world-views and faith-based architecture of church and state alike would be co-opted by *the rational*. Indeed, despite the differential development between Scotland and England the general tenor of social, cultural, economic and political life was rational-scientific.

Social-Environmental Metabolism

The impacts of these socio-economic transformations are generally accorded a significant place in the histories of the period, yet Gross's earlier observations with regard to the evanescence of history call attention to some of the markers that are overlooked as we consign what has passed to the vault of history. In particular, often overlooked and absent from these histories is the place of material environments, especially in their relation to social life and economic development. In considering the period 1830-1880 as one in which rapid agricultural and industrial development combined to create a series of crises, I turn to Marx's theory of metabolic rift and its significance not only for the past, but also the present. Resonating here is an extensive engagement with the combined forces of industrial, scientific and economic development.

At its heart, the theory of metabolic rift arises from Marx's ongoing engagement with the 'contradictory and unsustainable nature of capitalist agriculture'²⁷². The intensification of agricultural production during the period brought the depletion of soil fertility, exposing the dissonant relations between human beings and the material environments they occupied. With the advent of synthetic fertilisers the degradation of the land proceeded.

²⁷² Foster, J.B. (1999), 'Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical foundations for Environmental Sociology', *American Journal of Sociology*, 105 (2) September, pp. 366-405

Informed by the science of Justus von Liebig, Marx focussed on the interplay between two central forces – the one human, the other material:

Large landed property reduces the agricultural population to an ever decreasing minimum and confronts it with an ever growing industrial population crammed together in large towns; in this way it produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of the social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself. The result of this is a squandering of the vitality of the soil, which is carried by trade far beyond the bounds of a single country...Large-scale industry and industrially pursued large-scale agriculture have the same effect. If they are originally distinguished by the fact that the former lays waste and ruins the labour-power and thus the natural power of man, whereas the latter does the same to the natural power of the soil, they link up in the latter course of development, since the industrial system applied to agriculture also enervates the workers there, while industry and trade for their part provide agriculture with the means of exhausting the soil.²⁷³

Foster notes that ‘...for Marx, the excrement produced by man’s natural metabolism, along with the waste of industrial production and consumption, needed to be recycled back into production, as part of a complete metabolic cycle.’²⁷⁴ Concerned equally by the antagonism between town and country Engels articulated the extent of this metabolic rift more specifically with regard to England:

...in London alone a greater quantity of manure than is produced by the whole kingdom of Saxony is poured away every day into the sea with an expenditure of enormous sums and to the consequent need to re-establish an intimate connection between industrial and agricultural production along with as uniform a distribution as possible of the population over the whole country...²⁷⁵

In isolating the extent of this engagement with the sustainability of the land Foster returns to Marx:

Further afield Marx noted that this antagonistic division between town and country, and the metabolic rift that it entailed, was also evident at a more global level: whole colonies saw their land, resources, *and soil* robbed to support the industrialisation of the colonising countries. “For a century and a half,” Marx wrote, “England has indirectly exported the soil of Ireland, without as much as allowing its cultivators the means for making up the constituents of the soil that had been exhausted.”²⁷⁶

²⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 380

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 384

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*, pp.383-384

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 384

Foster's extensive exploration of Marx's work on ecological sustainability reveals its critical, yet often overlooked, importance. In relation to this work and the contention that histories resonate well into the present, it exposes the fact that there is a *dependent relation* between the cultivation of particular crops and fluctuations in market prices. In combination, these forces effectively subvert the necessary and sufficient conditions for agricultural production to endure generally and over time. That is, the destabilisation wrought by agriculture on environments owes as much to profit imperatives as it does to any other 'natural' or social force, to the degree that the metabolic rift of Marx's construction remains as present in its post-millennial setting as it was during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Back to the Future

The colonization of people and environments is grounded in both history and geography. Whether internal or external, rights in land and labour have consistently been the fulcrum on which relations of power have turned, to the point where they now stand as the cornerstone of contemporary global *economic* relations. Evidenced in the metabolic rift that characterised agricultural production in the mid-nineteenth, dissociative relations between humanity and its environs now extends well beyond its genesis. Indeed, the human consumption of non-renewable energy has consistently escalated to the point where CO₂ emissions now exceed the uptake of the global sink, along with CFC's (chlorofluorocarbons) and methane, which combine to create toxicity in both atmosphere and stratosphere²⁷⁷. Additionally, the production of food has been so progressively concentrated and supported by artificial means (through gene manipulation and synthetic fertilizers in particular) that the resulting environmental impacts have operated in series over time. Escalating in the 20th and 21st centuries, loss of top soil through erosion, overgrazing and phosphate run-off all combine to degrade the physical environments in which they occur as a generalizable condition of agriculture and farming²⁷⁸. Rebranded as 'agribusiness' these now internationalised production processes echo the formative yet extensive coverage of environmental degradation by Marx, Engels and von Liebig in the nineteenth century. As to the land on which these processes play out, the same may be said to apply. That is, any assumption that clearances or dispossession from common lands belongs solely to the medieval or early modern period defies all evidence²⁷⁹.

In an extensive review covering the period from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries, Alden Wily isolates the forces at work that reproduce the very conditions under which eviction from common land still occurs. That is, the precise form of these new clearances may have altered, yet the institutionalised force of law, coupled with privatisation and development

²⁷⁷ Bell, M.M. (2004), *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology* (2nd ed.), Sage, London pp. 5-10

²⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp.58-62

²⁷⁹ See: "Land Rights and the Rush for Land," in October 2011 at <http://www.landcoalition.org/cpl/CPL-synthesis-report>. A coalition of agencies and universities published the data on recorded and verified deals in a report.

(‘improvements’), have effectively established continuities in common land evictions. As she notes:

...It is 2011. Hundreds of rural communities in Africa – as well as parts of Asia and Latin America – are physically confronted with eviction or displacement or simply truncation of their livelihoods and lands they customarily presume to be their own. These lands are wilfully reallocated by their governments to mainly foreign investors to the tune of an estimated 220 million hectares since 2007, and still rising. Two thirds of the lands being sold or mainly leased are in poverty-stricken and investment-hungry Africa. Large-scale deals for hundreds of thousands of hectares dominate, although deals for smaller areas acquired by domestic investors run apace.²⁸⁰

Here post-millennial populations face not only spatial dislocations, but also diminishing control over the preservation of ecosystems that support them. In all cases, the necessary and sufficient conditions needed to carry feudalism into the dawn of a new mode of production have largely remained in place. Indeed, it was not until 2000 that the Abolition of Feudal Tenure (Scotland) Act was promulgated, followed by the Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Tenements (Scotland) Act 2004²⁸¹.

Writing of the disappearance of the commons, Monbiot responds to an influential supporter of their conversion to private holdings - Garrett Hardin, an American biologist who lamented the ‘tragedy of the commons’ as a lost opportunity to develop a shared resource. In his commentary Monbiot characterised Nardin’s position thus:

...common property will always be destroyed, because the gain that individuals make by over-exploiting it will outweigh the loss they suffer as a result of its over-exploitation. He used the example of a herdsman, keeping his cattle on a common pasture. With every cow the man added to his herds he would gain more than he lost: he would be one cow richer...the way to prevent this tragedy from unfolding was to privatize or nationalize common land.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Alden Wily, L., (2013) ‘The Global Land Grab: The New Enclosures’, in Bollier, D. & Helfrich, *The Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State*, Levellers Press
See: A coalition of agencies and universities published the data on recorded and verified deals in a report, “Land Rights and the Rush for Land,” in October 2011 at <http://www.landcoalition.org/cpl/CPL-synthesis-report>.

²⁸¹ ‘Age-old Scots property rights end Laws abolishing 800 years of feudal property rights have come into force in Scotland’, 28 November, 2004
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/4048529.stm

²⁸² Monbiot, G. (1994) ‘The Tragedy of Enclosure’, *Scientific American*, January, no. 38
<http://www.monbiot.com/1994/01/01/the-tragedy-of-enclosure/>

Monbiot goes on to note that the paper, published in *Science*, provided a rational basis for entities such as the World Bank, along with Western governments, to undertake '...the widespread privatization of land. In Africa, among newly independent governments looking for dramatic change, it encouraged the massive transfer of land from tribal peoples to the state or to individuals'²⁸³. For Monbiot the tragedy wasn't the loss of the commons, but rather, the impact of the enclosures. In relation to that loss, he concludes with the observation that:

As (the commons) disappear, so does much that makes our contact with the countryside meaningful: it becomes a series of unrelated resources, rather than an ecosystem of which we economically, culturally and spiritually, are a part. For human beings, as for the biosphere, the tragedy of the commons is not the tragedy of their existence but the tragedy of their disappearance.²⁸⁴

In moving to consider the effects of these dissonant relationships, Chapter 4 turns to the emergence of sustainability as both popular discursive icon and 'strategic response'. In charting its course, the many and varied transformations that characterized its development call attention to the historical settings that steered it, as well as the contests that claimed it.

²⁸³ *ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *ibid.*

Chapter 4

The Evolution of Sustainability

Preceded by several decades of nature conservancy, sustainability emerged not as a ready-made manifesto of ideals, but slowly, as the limits of preservation and conservation were being reached. During the 1930's the impetus to conserve and preserve had coalesced in the US environmental policy of Theodore Roosevelt²⁸⁵. Crafted during a period in which the socially constructed idea of wilderness had become iconic²⁸⁶, Roosevelt's engagement was ambiguous. On the one hand he legislated the establishment of national parks to a degree not previously seen, yet he did so from a position of identifying nature as resource. Contrasting sharply with the environmentalism of the period²⁸⁷, Roosevelt was focussed on preservation and continuity in the service of development. Further afield, nature's aesthetic, along with the challenges to its management, was equally evident in African²⁸⁸, Asian²⁸⁹, European²⁹⁰ and Latin American²⁹¹ nations.

The engagement with nature so characteristic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found considerable purchase throughout the US and elsewhere, yet it was to find itself recalibrated during the second half of the twentieth century as science and technology combined in the service of economic development. With mounting signs of environmental degradation capturing the attention of publics nationally and internationally, the period from the 1950's onwards saw a proliferation in assorted struggles on behalf of nature, along with the conservation movements that were to become forerunners of modern environmentalism.

²⁸⁵ Brinkley, D. (2009) *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America*, New York, Harper Collins

King, J. (2009) *The Conservation Fight : From Theodore Roosevelt to the Tennessee Valley Authority*, Public Affairs Press: Washington DC

²⁸⁶ Bell, M.M. (2004), *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology* (2nd ed.), Sage: London, p. 187

²⁸⁷ Leopold, A. and Meine, C. (2013) *A Sand County Almanac and other writings on ecology and conservation*, Library of America (ebook), New York; Knight, R. L. and Riedel, S. (2002) *Aldo Leopold and the Ecological Conscience*, New York: Oxford University Press, New York

²⁸⁸ Carruthers, J (2004) 'Africa: Histories, Ecologies and Societies', *Environment and History*, 10, pp. 379-406

²⁸⁹ Johnson, E., Saito, Y., and Nishikido, M., (2009) 'Organizational Demography of Japanese Environmentalism', *Sociological Enquiry*, Nov., Vol. 79, Issue 4, pp. 481-504

²⁹⁰ Cioc, M (2002) *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815-2000*, University of Washington, Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books: Washington DC

²⁹¹ Miller, S. W. (2004) *An Environmental History of Latin America*, Brigham Young University, Utah

Pre-eminent among them was Rachel Carson. As biologist, writer and activist she brought into a world of mounting political, economic and social tensions one of the most incisive and poignant expositions of modernity's scientific taming of nature. In her exposition of the hazards of DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane), Carson documented the grim effects of a chemical synthesised in laboratories and indiscriminately deployed as the mega-pesticide that would rid the planet of malaria-carrying mosquitoes, plague-infected lice and assorted threats to agricultural production. Unrelenting in her call for action, Carson went on to alert her readership to the inevitable human impacts that would be felt as the indiscriminate bug-killer ascended the food chain and undermined the human immune system. In 1962 her efforts coalesced into *Silent Spring*²⁹², something of a manifesto for the emerging environmental movement. As implied by the title, the birds would die, and spring would be silenced.

Carson's efforts and impacts have been well documented elsewhere²⁹³ but less well covered has been the alignment of her science with the substance of her thinking, writing and acting. In particular, Carson's aesthetic, philosophical, scientific and moral-ethical dispositions appear as a unified bundle in which there is no disjuncture or dissonance. Importantly, her ability to invoke an eloquent, accessible voice meant that she was able to communicate her much feted concerns broadly and with strong effect. That malaria had become a scourge was, for Carson, not at issue. Rather, she took the view that while malaria should not be ignored, the wisdom of attacking the problem by methods that made it worse deserved fuller consideration than had hitherto been forthcoming. This view received particular attention as the resistances of the very 'pests' it set out to destroy mobilised in their own defence.

Running counter to the scientific impulse of the time, Carson brought to bear a moral-ethical dimension to assorted interventions into worlds beyond the merely human. That is to say, she challenged the provenance of a science that held a potentially damnable and often unchecked privilege. Accordingly, as

²⁹² Carson, R. (2002) *Silent spring*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

²⁹³ Hynes, H. Patricia (1989) *The Recurring Silent Spring* (Athene series) Pergamon Press, New York, and MacGillivray, A., Turnbull, N. (ed.) (2004) *Rachel Carson's Silent Spring: Words that Changed the World*, Cameron House, South Australia

testing of DDT expanded, public concern escalated and on June 14, 1972, its domestic use was banned in the US²⁹⁴.

Clearly, the broad social, political and economic context within which these battles took place was one in which human-wrought environmental degradation was brought into sharp relief. During the next decade, economic and 'developmental' activities found themselves drawn into a wider-ranging challenge to mitigate damage to both natural environments and diverse species – human among them. It was within this context, already primed by the activism of the 1960's and 70's, that a new era found purchase.

The 1980's is characteristically that period where a co-ordinated international attempt was made to constrain production and consumption processes that were being progressively implicated in the destabilisation of the planetary web of life. Chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's), nitrous oxide, methane and a host of complex compounds had made their various ways into environments beyond those for which they had originally been designed and intended. Leaching into soil, water and atmosphere, the toxic load was disrupting, disfiguring and now polluting, to a point where assorted sciences were deployed to address explicit threats to habitat, diversity and economy²⁹⁵.

Here, the destabilising effects of progress were slowly incorporated into popular consciousness and external worlds inhabited by other than human species were drawn into the foreground. Notably, the nature-aesthetic movements of the era found their place, along with a host of more parochial-local initiatives that flourished as outgrowths of nature protection movements. Central to much of the popular discourse here was the notion that nature and development were antithetical. That is to say, nature needed to be protected against the impost of development, it could not be included in it.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ MacGillivray, A., (2004) *Words that changed the World: Rachel Carson's Silent Spring*, Bookwise, South Australia, p.78

²⁹⁵ Bell, M.M. (2004) *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology* (2nd ed.), Sage, London pp.5-16

²⁹⁶ See Birch (1999) pp.91-99

Running parallel with this popular, biocentric push toward protectionism was an international, state-led movement that repositioned 'nature' as integral to development. Writing of the period, Sachs notes that:

With the formulation of the 'World Conservation Strategy' of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the United Nations Environment Protection Programme in 1980...a shift in perception took place at the global level that had already taken root among American Protectionists after the turn of the century: nature evolved from a treasure to be preserved into a resource whose yield had to be sustained...what mattered about nature was its yield for human use...(A)s a consequence, nature entered into debates, not as commons, but as a resource commanding economic value.²⁹⁷

Significantly, the effect of this globalising process widened the divide between the robust economies of the North and the largely impoverished South. Here the imperative of development became an articulating force as the countries of the South looked to redress their place in the combined yet still uneven development into which they had been incorporated. Calling the issues into play Sachs situates the nature of this pervasive aspiration:

(T)he principle interest of the South at the Stockholm as well as the Rio Conference ...can be described in one word: development...a token for the long-frustrated southern desire to change the balance of power in the world to its favour...Development is the battle cry against exclusion...It expresses the mimetic desire of the South eventually to reach the levels of affluence which are found in the North...Thus emerges the paradox that, until today, southern governments have been able to hail 'sustainable development' without ever abandoning the North as their implicit Utopia.²⁹⁸

In certain cases the South did advance some claim to the economic benefit that accrues to development, yet it is noteworthy that the majority of countries so situated operate on the basis of centralised systems of control, especially with regard to natural resources. By implication, local communities that rely upon those same resources are excised from negotiations about the ways in which development and environmental management will proceed. In effect, the distinction between North and South obscures the fact that where advances do occur they do so in the name of a now globally orientated middle class.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Sachs, W., cited in in Redclift, M. & Woodgate, G. (1997) *The International Handbook of Environmental Sociology*, Edward Elgar, UK, p. 72

²⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.72

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.74

As a case in point:

...the unsustainability of the present global development model is probably better understood in China than the conventional industrial heartlands of Europe and North America. There, politicians fear backlash from citizens reacting as consumers to anything that alters their lifestyle in ways they perceive as deleterious. This results in demand for low fuel prices, profligate material and energy consumption, and persistent ignorance of the social and environmental conditions under which global products are created. Environmentalist challenges to business as usual remain outside the mainstream, and the usual unsustainable patterns of production and consumption of the developed world persist.³⁰⁰

The most extreme registers of this state of affairs occur in urban, industrial centres³⁰¹, but outlying rural provinces also bear the brunt. In effect, the process of combined and uneven development rests on both the external *and* internal marginalisation of local communities, to the degree that poverty accompanies development as both pre-condition and consequence. In more concrete terms this plays out not only in terms of environmental degradation, but just as importantly, in processes where the default position is set to extended levels of labour exploitation. Exemplifying the broad and contemporary sweep of this process is the now normative incorporation of child labour as a feature of 'development'. In effect, this situation is so pervasive that evidence-based research now leads a somewhat paradoxical intervention into the process. Driven by the World Bank³⁰² (Human Development Sector: Africa Region) and the Amsterdam-based foundation, IREWOC³⁰³ (International Research on Working Children), the extent of the problem was estimated to involve some 210 million children below the age of fifteen years in 2004. Needless to say, the vast majority of countries (and children) so afflicted lie in developing countries.

The current state of play with regard to vulnerable environments, species and populations is well documented, yet the appetite for change and redress regarding the North-South binary is minimal, to the point of being largely indiscernible. In part, the continuing economic divide between North and

³⁰⁰ Adams, W.M. (2008) *The Future of Sustainability: Re-thinking Environment and Development in the Twenty-First Century* (Report on the Renowned Thinkers Meeting, 29-31 January 2006), p.8

³⁰¹ See, for example: 'The Case of Mumbai', Dr. Neerlima Risbud

http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global_Report/pdfs/Mumbai.pdf

³⁰² (The) World Bank, Africa Region Human Development (2001), *Issues in Child Labour in Africa*.

³⁰³ Foundation of International Research on Working Children (2005), *Studying Child Labour: Policy Implications of Child Centred Research*. www.irewoc.nl

South arises as the legacy of the Brundtland Commission (World Commission on Environment and Development), which on March 20, 1987 proclaimed sustainable development to be that form of development 'that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.³⁰⁴ What this exhortation avoided was any direct engagement with the internationally structured inequalities that actually locate, geographically, those populations whose needs the Commission purported to address. By implication, any notion of justice is dispatched in favour of natural environments *as the primary focus of developmental evolution*. In the process, *sustainable development* came to constitute the new watermark that would be stamped onto all future negotiations with regard to the *human-nature-development* complex.

Given the limits and lack of specificity with regard to the Commission's recommendations, it was perhaps inevitable that the sectional interests that lay claim to sustainability would produce something of a contest over its various meanings. Indeed, the edict of 1987 was to be supplanted, some two decades later, by notions of reconciliation between three hitherto competing interests. Much revised these 'three pillars of sustainability' found a place at the table of global development. As the 2005 UN World Summit³⁰⁵ noted, the reconciliation of *natural-environmental*, *social* and *economic* demands was an inescapable imperative. Now the subject of assorted Venn diagrams, the three pillars of sustainability were posted as a set of overlapping yet still unifying principles that might foster broad support. In short, the *natural environment* could now be aligned with *economies* and *societies* without any fear of devastation.

If history bears testament to the fact that our public discourse has expanded to include and embrace the notion, concept and 'practice' of sustainability, then our claims upon it are surely mediated by the inverse relationship between that discourse on the one hand, and an expanded nexus of power

³⁰⁴ United Nations General Assembly (March 20, 1987). ["Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future; Transmitted to the General Assembly as an Annex to document A/42/427 - Development and International Co-operation: Environment; Our Common Future, Chapter 2: Towards Sustainable Development; Paragraph 1". United Nations General Assembly. <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm>.](#)

³⁰⁵ United Nations General Assembly (2005). [2005 World Summit Outcome](#), Resolution A/60/1, adopted by the General Assembly on 15 September 2005

relations on the other. I allude here to the role of the state and its attendant institutional forms, as well as the grounded interests of capital in all its guises. Just as our more recent embrace of sustainability provided a locus and focus for their activities, so too did their complex engagements feed the continuity that underscored their evolution. Yet continuity does, by its very nature, court disruption, and recent decades have seen some slippage in those cycles and rhythms that for so long kept the wheels of environmental progress turning. Consider the *conserving*, *protecting* and *saving* that so engaged the social movements of the 60's and 70's, and their subsequent seepage into the neo-liberal domain of sustainable development. Much transformed and eventually recycled, these laudable activities found their way into a landscape characterised by new structural imperatives upon which sustainable *economic* development might be built. That these evolving processes pertain to power relations is perhaps obvious, but what is less clear is the way in which our contests about sustainability are nullified and superseded by the interests of populations (human and other) driven into ever-closer relationships with degrading environments (built and natural).

In so far as contemporary disparities between developed and developing nations register specific and empirical expressions of 'sustainable development', they are more often than not characterised by intensive responses to the increasing (human) demands that come with population growth. Whilst agriculture has generally been the primary vehicle in transforming rates of food production, it is supported by a range of industries that are similarly disposed to processes of productive intensification.

Bell³⁰⁶ charts the history of one case example that calls attention to the rate and orientation of food production, not simply in the impoverished South, but also as an indicative trend at the international level. Recounting 'the Case of Miracle Rice' he traverses the agricultural history of the International Rice Research Institute from 1959 at its inception in the Philippines, until 2002. Notable here is the extent to which a major transformation in production resulted in the eventual decline, not only in rice production, but importantly, the elimination of a significant protein source.

³⁰⁶ Bell, M. (2004) *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology* (2nd ed.), Sage, London, pp.94-96

Under the pre-existing system of rice cultivation, paddy fish were an integral part of the ecology of the environment and were a constant source of protein that accompanied the harvest. With the advent of new and mechanized practices, pre-existing cultivation methods were dispensed with and rice varieties were hybridised so that they could tolerate mechanised planting processes as well as far higher rates of artificial fertilization. The net effect of this developmental innovation was to see yields increase dramatically in the period 1968-1981. By the mid-1980's, however, this trend was reversed through increased pest damage, loss of genetic diversity and the decimation of paddy fish. With these environmental impacts came increased social inequalities that resulted from the intensive farming process, largely attributable to the new form of farming that required more capital investment per acre of cultivated land. This resulted in access to the new methods being restricted to those farmers who had the capital resources to purchase hybrid seed, fertilizer and pesticide. What had once sustained the cohort of rice producers and their families was overturned in favour of increased yields, and hence profit. Yet like the externalities that pertain to the natural environment, so too the millions of people who found themselves forced from their land in poverty.

Given these embedded inequities, it is clear that sustainability has lost much of its original meaning. Originally cast as a word that attributed worthiness to the business of maintaining various 'natural environments' through well-reasoned use of primary resources, it now provokes an array of questions and declarations about just what it is, and what it is not. Hijacked by economists, scholars, researchers, institutions, governments and production processes, sustainability has been drawn into service as an imperative for *responsible economic* development. Indeed, the space sustainability now occupies appears to be one in which a balance between giving and taking seems not just improbable, but impossible. In many respects this may be attributable to the fact that the ground upon which ideas and production processes develop is increasingly carved into differentiated domains. Reconstituted through assorted specialisations, the range and scope of vision contracts, the better to control and contain those same ideas and production processes. Distanced from the whole, the array of particularities that we summon in our economic,

political and cultural engagements becomes similarly disabling, rather than enabling. Inevitably, then, the impetus to sustain the natural environments so characteristic of the 1960's and 70's finds itself transformed into a disengaged and dissonant set of endeavours – few of which manage to reach across productive or scholarly borders. Indeed, whilst environmental sociology³⁰⁷, environmental anthropology³⁰⁸, human ecology³⁰⁹ and a host of other disciplines all occupy some space with regard to both the local and extended impact of development, they also reflect and express a range of inter and intra-disciplinary tensions that limit the degree to which a fuller and more robust contribution might be made to the overriding importance of sustaining the integrity of our life support systems. As a case in point, the sub-discipline of environmental sociology divides into factions that each claim prominence above their cohorts. For example, the materialist and realist camps engage directly with the physical-natural elements of sustainability. By contrast, the (social) constructivists assert and implicate the primacy of the social as it infuses various constructions of nature³¹⁰. Each camp, constrained by the relative value of its own insights has, to a degree, limited the reach of the sub-discipline in ways that have constrained a broader and more public engagement. In acknowledging that much of the research and scholarship that applies here is valuable, it has yet to be profitably and sustainably combined to inform a way forward in bringing its discourse to ground.

In contrast with the disciplinary settings within which sustainability discourse and debates take place are the institutional formations that occupy a larger space. In his 're-thinking' of sustainability Adams represents a more internationalised movement that enjoys some legitimacy. As a contributing member of the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and

³⁰⁷ Redclift, M. & Woodgate, G. eds. (2005) *New Developments in Environmental Sociology*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK; Redclift, M. & Woodgate, G. (1997) *The International Handbook of Environmental Sociology*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK; Gould, K. & Lewis, T. (2008) *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

³⁰⁸ (The) Society for Applied Anthropology (SAA), "What is Environmental Anthropology?" (<http://www.sfaa.net/eap/ea.html>); Sponsel L. (2004) 'Encyclopedia of Earth', *Ecological Anthropology*, May (http://www.eoearth.org/article/Ecological_anthropology)

³⁰⁹ Young, G.L. (ed.) (1989) *Origins of Human Ecology*, Hutchinson Ross, Stroudsburg, PA; Wright, S.D., R. Borden, M. Bubolz, L. Hens, J. Taylor and T. Webler (1995) *Human Ecology: Progress Through Integrative Perspectives*, Society for Human Ecology, Fort Collins, CO

³¹⁰ Redclift, M. & Woodgate, G. (1997) op. cit., 'Sustainability and Social Construction', pp.55-69

Natural Resources) he strives to activate some of the precepts upon which sustainability might be recast. Engaged in a process that drew 'Renowned Thinkers' together in January 2006, his brief was to establish a platform for environmental diplomacy, to the degree that sustainability as a motif for the preservation of natural resources might be reinvigorated. Given the international context within which his contribution was developed it comes as no surprise that in noting the urgency and risk currently faced by the global commons, there is a concomitant imperative to critically resituate the 'dominant patterns of global development' as totally unsustainable³¹¹. Yet that said, the mechanics of addressing problems associated with national development have been so slow to find effect that the framing of an overarching, international set of principles that might have been generally applied finds itself defeated by the sheer scope of the challenge.

Addressing the fact that sustainability is now 'overworked and tired' as concept and aspirational imperative, Adams continues to promote its potential as a recognized 'brand':

While the concept is clearly burdened with a great deal of excess weight, and many potentially conflicting ideas have become attached to it like barnacles on a ship's hull, it still has considerable power. The concept of sustainability is widely recognized and discussed ...it has taken a decade and a half's effort to build (it) into the thinking of local and national governments, business and universities...(it is) an established 'brand' that has wide recognition and still expresses core values to a wide audience...³¹²

In developing his position, he presents three discrete yet interrelated hypotheses that might be 'tested' in the reinvigoration of sustainability³¹³. The first resituates sustainability within an evolutionary approach that reorientates the concept through emphasising its original meaning. The second asserts the timeliness of a new approach to global sustainability. The third positions the IUCN as a leader in the development of new thinking about sustainability.

³¹¹ Adams, W.M. (2008) *The Future of Sustainability: Re-thinking Environment and Development in the Twenty-First Century* (Report on the Renowned Thinkers Meeting, 29-31 January 2006), IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), p. 7.

³¹² www.iucn.org

³¹² *ibid.*, p.7

³¹³ *ibid.*, pp.10-11

On the face of it, Adams' hypotheses appear limited in that they strive to establish an international set of co-ordinates that might help chart a way through environmental degradation and climatic disruption. In many respects this position drags the 'overworked and tired' attempts to materialise sustainability into a context within which any movement seems unlikely. Yet that said, his reworking of the ways in which human need is calibrated may have some value in engaging publics at a more local level – particularly because of the now inescapable impost of development. In contrast, the larger domain of international environmental diplomacy will doubtless carry on in the business-as-usual fashion that has characterised its limited success, but individual cases, such as China, may have little choice but to address the impacts of environmental degradation more locally³¹⁴.

The tensions with regard to sustainability continue to hold their position at the interface of scientific research and data collection and the strategic positioning of capital. All the while, the underlying lack of both resolution and resolve remains. As a case in point, Van den Berg explores the current status of DDT production and the extent of its continued applications, especially in developing countries:

DDT is currently being produced in three countries: India, China, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea). By far the largest amounts are produced in India for the purpose of disease vector control. In China, the average annual production during the period 2000–2004 was 4,500 metric tons of DDT, but 80–90% was used in the production of Dicofol, an acaricide, and around 4% was used as additive in antifouling paints. The remainder was meant for malaria control and was exported. Recent information from the DPRK [United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), unpublished data] indicates that 160 metric tons of DDT is produced per year, for use mainly in agriculture (*which is not acceptable under the Stockholm Convention*) and a small portion for use in public health. India and China both export DDT to countries in Africa, either as technical product or as a formulation, for the purpose of vector control. DDT is being formulated in Ethiopia and South Africa with ingredients imported from China. South Africa exports some of its formulated product to other countries in Africa.³¹⁵ [Emphasis added]

³¹⁴ See: China Air pollution

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/chinas-choice/2013/jun/18/pollution-china>

³¹⁵ Van den Berg, H. (2009) 'Global Status of DDT and Its Alternatives for Use in Vector Control to Prevent Disease', *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Nov., 117(11), p. 1517

If we review the impact of Rachel Carson's exposition of the hazards that accrue to DDT, along with its legislated ban in 1972, then any contemporary claim on the efficacy of international environmental brokerage seems faint, to say the least. This is especially so in the face of both its human impacts, as well as alternatives available in vector control. In the case of the former, Van den Berg notes that:

Health effects of DDT and DDE most commonly suggested by studies in North America and Europe are early pregnancy loss, fertility loss, leukaemia, pancreatic cancer, neurodevelopmental deficits, diabetes, and breast cancer. In many cases the results have not been consistent between studies, but nevertheless these accumulating reports bear much concern, particularly in relation to chronic effects. Breast cancer has been most rigorously studied; even though the majority of results showed no causative association with DDT exposure, the latest evidence indicates an increased risk in women who were exposed at a young age. In addition, experimental studies on animals have demonstrated neurotoxic, carcinogenic, immunotoxic, and reproductive effects attributable to DDT and DDE.³¹⁶

As to vector control:

...(B)efore the advent of synthetic insecticides, vector control depended primarily on environmental management; a meta-analysis of data mostly from that period indicated that it substantially reduced malaria risk...Improvement of housing...through plastering of walls or closing of eaves, contributes significantly to transmission control....(T)he role of aquatic predators as control agents of malaria vectors is potentially enhanced through conservation or through the introduction of agents from outside...such as Larvivorous fish (which) have frequently been reared and released for controlling vector breeding in small water tanks and wells...³¹⁷

Absent the necessary and ongoing commitment to redress just one element of social-environmental damage (the ongoing production of DDT) both sustainability and sustainable development continue to simply materialise, morph and then evaporate, displaced here and there by the 'next big thing', most recently, the GFC (Global Financial Crisis). Lacking any obvious moral-ethical impetus, ideas and practice lay uncoupled as the instrumentalism embedded in negotiations about *what* gets sustained, and *how*, proceeds. That is, the ground constantly moves beneath the feet of national governments, international brokerage agencies, and the various capital interests in play at any given time, depending upon the particular policy drivers at work.

³¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1518

³¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 1519

Responding to shifting conceptions of sustainability, Aidan Davison³¹⁸, in his 'quest for sustainability', summons the relation of theory and practice. Engaged by the prospect of ambivalence as it emerges when 'matters of morality and matters of technology' are drawn into tension, he explores the neat shift from agreed theory as it might translate into eventually aligned 'practice', particularly as he reasons through the militating impacts that prevail when theory and practice are as uncoupled as they currently are. Alert to the contestable nature of sustainability, he calls on practical reason as mediator in the battle, asserting the dialectical nature of the relationship between sustainability theory and sustainability practice.³¹⁹

Davison's construction carries a clear acknowledgement of the messiness inherent in efforts to materialize sustainability. Wrought by the disjuncture of theory and practice, this messiness is recovered in the service of locating and situating a moral imperative, along with those injunctions that might characterise sustainability. Drawing on Aristotelian observances about the defining differences between practical reason and other intellectual pursuits he continues:

Unlike other modalities of reason, practical reasoning allows for no separation of ends and means, no sorting of values from facts...Articulated in the context of action, practical moral goals conform not to ideals of consistency, universality and lawfulness but to experience of particular yet shared worlds. While finite, these worlds are infinitely changeable. Occupied only locally, and thus known only in fragments, these worlds are nonetheless seamless in their relationality. Immensely confusing, inconsistent and ambivalent, these worlds are nonetheless meaningful in their heterogeneity.³²⁰

This necessary mix of morality and reason will 'confound academic, professional and bureaucratic divisions of labour'. Yet for all that it may yield a more grounded and panoramic vista for the slippery, shape-shifting word that has eluded our collective capacity to deploy both morality *and* practical reason in the business of crafting sustainability.

³¹⁸ Davison, A. (2008) 'Contesting Sustainability in theory-practice: In praise of ambivalence', *Continuum*, 22: 2, p. 191

³¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 197

³²⁰ *ibid.*, p.197

In moving from the wide-ranging discourse that would capture sustainability an obvious void opens. Constituted by physical space and place, it is the local ground upon which efforts to materialise sustainability might find some purchase. Given that this work is framed around community life in its complexity, a recent move toward disciplinary border-crossings demonstrates in practical terms what has thus far been largely theorized.

Setting the scene, I turn to an expanded initiative that has broadened the range and scope of interdisciplinary programs and projects that integrate ecological and social sciences. In focusing on coupled human and natural systems, Jianguo Liu et al³²¹ review a series of case studies covering the five continents of Africa, China, USA, South America, Europe. In drawing these studies together they elaborate a series of context-specific social and natural ecological challenges, and while the six case studies under review carry some of the precepts of Human Ecology and other related disciplines, they extend well beyond them through a synthesising of disciplines and practice areas that include environmental science, urban design and planning, fisheries and wildlife, ecological economics, anthropology, geography, zoology, political theory and policy analysis, eco-environmental sciences, agricultural and applied economics and biological sciences.

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that the notion of 'coupled human and natural systems' does not resonate immediately with the foregoing contests over sustainability and sustainable development. Yet the specificity with which the work of Liu and others was undertaken and reviewed sets the scene for a far more robust engagement with the substantive issues that are so often excluded from the sustainability debate. In particular, the coupled human and natural systems referred to here are 'integrated systems in which people interact with natural components'³²². As the authors observe, there have been many studies and projects that engage with human-nature interactions, yet far fewer that look to the *actual complexity* of those coupled systems. They note further that the lack of real progress here is largely

³²¹ Liu, J., et al (2007), 'Complexity of Coupled Human and Natural Systems', *Science*, Vol. 317, p. 1513

³²² *ibid.*, p. 1513

attributable to the traditional separations between ecological and social sciences, along with theoretical, rather than empirical, research.

For Liu et al, the projects that form the basis of their work are located in urban, semi-urban and rural areas in both developed and developing countries, including the Kenyan Highlands, Wolong Nature Reserve for Giant Pandas in China, Central Puget Sound in Washington, Altamira in Brazil and Kristianstad in Sweden. All of the studies took place in different ecological, socio-economic, political, demographic and cultural settings and they encompassed a variety of ecosystem services and environmental problems. Context specific, they were all subject to longitudinal studies that yielded valuable data and information that could not have been gathered from either ecological or social research processes operating in isolation³²³.

While it is beyond the scope of this work to provide a comprehensive account of each discrete research site, the case example of Wolong Nature Reserve for giant pandas draws out the value of interdisciplinarity in responding to human and other species threat.

Wolong occupies some 2,000 square kilometres in Sichuan Province, southwest China. As at 2005 it supported a human population of approximately 4,500, along with about 6,000 species of other animals and plants. The area was covered in bamboo forest that constituted the habitat and food source of the pandas³²⁴, as well as providing a fuel source for human communities in the area.

The underlying threat to the panda population arose from a complex of human activities. In the first instance local residents in Wolong used the bamboo forests as a fuelwood source for their cooking. As the forests closer to residential settlements were depleted the area of fuelwood gathering extended significantly. Not surprisingly, the result was not only a deterioration in panda habitat, with accompanying species threat, but also the depletion of a natural resource upon which the local community relied.

³²³ *ibid.*, p.1513

³²⁴ *ibid.*, p.1514

Given the progressive decline in both habitat and natural resources the Chinese government attempted to restore both through three major conservation initiatives. Initially a reserve was created in the hope that this would secure some level of protection for the panda habitat. Despite this, however, threats to the habitat increased. This situation arose when, in 2001, a natural forest conservation program was introduced. Local residents were paid subsidies to monitor any illegal harvesting of bamboo. With a subsidy rate of 20% to 25% of average household income, pre-existing households split into increasing numbers to capture the subsidy. The effect was to increase reliance on both fuel wood and land for housing construction.

Responding to this outcome the researchers looked to some of the other significant factors at play. The price of electricity and household size constituted two of the more pressing, though their impacts over time varied significantly. In the case of electricity, price fluctuations tended to determine fuelwood consumption more immediately. With regard to the spacing of births in households, the time delay on environmental impacts was longer because of the time taken for children to reach adulthood, where they established new households.

What is noteworthy with regard to the specific findings in Wolong is the fact that it led the research team to look more broadly at other 'biodiversity hotspots'. Of particular interest here is

...the finding that the number of households increased faster than the human population size in Wolong over the past three decades (which) led to the discovery that this trend is global and is particularly profound in 76 countries.³²⁵

Of equal importance to the research were the legacy effects that were noted in all six studies. That is, the orientation of human-nature interactions over time produced a series of effects that mediated in the current status of environmental health. The durations of these legacy effects differed from site to site, in some cases from decades to centuries. Importantly, the authors note that the specificity of this research precludes any direct transfer of results or strategic responses to other sites; the imperative to increase research efforts in other sites should extend to the interactions *between* sites and systems, particularly given the intensification of globalization.

³²⁵ *ibid.*, p.1516

In recognition of this they conclude by asserting that:

...it is critical to move beyond existing approaches for studying coupled systems, to develop more comprehensive portfolios, and to build an international network for interdisciplinary research spanning local, regional, national and global levels.³²⁶

In so far as the empirical nature of this research is concerned, its value lies in the temporal, geophysical and socioeconomic drivers of environmental change. Informing policy and planning on the basis of such a comprehensive approach is far more likely to activate a sustainable response to human-natural systems.

The value of grounding the theory-practice of sustainability through approaches of the type outlined above highlights not only the benefits that may well accrue to co-creative, interdisciplinary partnerships, but also the very real limits of current internationalised processes that address themselves to a host of human-nature-environment challenges. Indeed, the very context within which these negotiations play out is one in which the local-regional dimension of various lifeworlds is consigned to the management of national governments, undoubtedly on the assumption that each will extend the precepts and agreements embedded in a host of conventions and protocols to the local level. Yet the economic drivers of development so often constitute the greatest impediment to a coherent and well-managed implementation process. Additionally, assumptions embedded in a range of international accords, especially those on emission reduction schemes, reveal a resounding lack of evidence-based, strategic responses that fit local and regional settings. Rather, it is more usually the case that national signatories to these processes simply 'agree' to reduce emissions, at the specified rate, as a generalisable and achievable goal. Absent any detailed knowledge of and engagement with the local-regional commons, and given the paucity of evidence-based research of the type outlined above, some clarity emerges with regard to current unsuccessful attempts to actually produce significant change in a host of adverse developmental impacts.

³²⁶ *ibid.*, p.1516

As to the evolution of sustainability, along with its current status as motif for theory and practice, there appears to be no consistent evidence to support the view that sustainability has gained purchase beyond a local-regional milieu. In many respects this hints at the fact that the broader social-political-economic context within which it emerged was one characterized by intense transformation that extended well beyond the regional level. According to Adams, this now overworked and tired 'brand' is sorely in need of resurrection, yet the fact that it may be reclaimed and reinvigorated is, perhaps, less the issue. Rather, the collective international will to activate that meaning takes us closer to the heart of the matter. On the face of it, and given developmental imperatives and embedded relations of power, it may well be left to communities and regions to invoke enlightened self-interest in the project of working to sustain the lifeworlds they occupy.

Part One: Review

The sustainability of community life is, by turns, a local and an extended enterprise; local, to the degree that spatial proximity engages all species in a relational dynamic, yet extended by virtue of the impacts and processes that infiltrate the locale from beyond. In contextualising the place of community within its broader, planetary setting, the constant flows between both can be more realistically situated. That is, the meaning and material presence of community exists as part of, rather than apart from, regional, national and international domains. By extension, the values and beliefs that operate beyond the commons are also a part of them. The interactive flow here is often tense, complex, sometimes two-way, and never exclusively linear.

With these things in mind, the context that informed this work extends to thinking and conceptualising that engages with the complexity of human-nature-environment interactions. The task here has been to overcome the binaries, limits and exclusions that so often dampen the opportunity to think differently about the various worlds we occupy. That said, the scholarship that informed the process was equally engaged by empirical information and suffered no exclusions in a bid to capture a more meaningful rendering of human-and-other.

In revisiting the temporal markers that characterise progress and development some attention has been devoted to the resonance of our collective histories, especially as they impact on the present through their embeddedness in economic, scientific and technological forces. The transition from feudalism to capitalism gives some effect to this process, particularly because it challenges the idea that once consigned to the past a specific mode of living and producing has been superseded, never to surface again. In effect, continuities that are wrought through deeper ideological and material forces go unchallenged, to the degree that human and other populations, along with natural and built environments, bear the brunt.

This plays out through the many and varied constructions of sustainability and sustainable development that exist as theorizing in isolation, rather than as theorizing informed through direct engagement. In the contemporary international context, collective national responses to various environmental-climatic challenges arrive as reactive strategies to existing *developmental* imperatives, many of which remain unchanged and unchallenged.

While these overarching, internationalised production and consumption processes proceed apace, the integrated, interdisciplinary approaches that are brought to bear at the local and regional level show some promise in contributing to a knowledge base with regard to coupled human and natural systems. In responding to the very deficits so characteristic of international summits, conventions, accords and protocols they assert a credible and much needed alternative, such that the current impasse on sustainability might be addressed.

In turning to Part Two of this thesis, I extend the groundwork undertaken in Part One to its application. Here I am specifically concerned with the relationship between theoretical-conceptual framing and the primary research process. Evidenced by the supporting literature cited above, physical environments form an integral part of the sustainability of all life and must be located in direct relation to the human-social domain in which they arise. The turn to communities of place constitutes a starting point in this process, one that captures the complexities and variations that apply in the local domain.

Part Two

Meetings at the Margins

Introduction

Part Two of this thesis constitutes all elements of the primary research process. As noted in Chapters One and Two, the development of the communography constituted a direct response to the limits of pre-existing approaches. In asserting the relative value of an expanded engagement with local lifeworlds, particularly as they evoke responses to sustainability, I took the view that while ideological forces have shaped the development of economic and social life generally, so too the agency of actants that stand beyond the human. In every respect, individual views and values that find effect in communities operate in direct relation to a complex suite of forces that lie beyond the human. In the context of this research they are resituated as vital elements in the sustainability of both local and planetary contexts.

Undoubtedly, an obvious challenge arises here, one that goes to the heart of social research generally, and qualitative research in particular. More specifically, I acknowledge that an orthodox approach would have legitimised the nature and orientation of this research; by definition, a reflexive-ethnographic approach automatically engages with *the human* as an a priori area of focus³²⁷. Yet given that I did not know what I would encounter as I journeyed into the various communities I would work in, I had to account for an expanded range of possibilities. For example, the human dimension of sustainability may well be a critical driver in producing various forms of sustainability-in-practice. Yet so too could a range of physical-environmental forces shape the ways in which sustainability might be approached. While it might be argued that an ethnography could be 'stretched' to accommodate these additional and as yet unknown forces, I held to the view that too much methodological adaptation obscures the need to actually devise an approach that is truly 'fit for purpose'. Just as importantly, the overall research process, along with its accompanying methodology, should be *accurately* named, rather than conveniently 'extended'. In short, I made a clear decision not to square the circle.

³²⁷ See for example: Laimputtong, P. (2011), *Qualitative Research Methods* (3rd. edn.), Oxford University Press, Victoria. pp. 166-167

Prior to making this decision I initially looked to a range of alternative approaches in disciplines and sub-disciplines, including environmental anthropology, environmental sociology, human ecology, as well as deep ecology and ecofeminism. While environmental anthropology and environmental sociology provide a level of methodological structure and 'fit' with regard to this research, they are each limited in their respective applications. In neither case, for example, is there any consistent application of the suite of criteria that I wished to apply³²⁸. With regard to environmental anthropology, the history of its own unfolding persists, to the degree that (most) primary research remains engaged with the substance of its original emergence: namely environmental activism in its various forms³²⁹.

In the case of environmental sociology, its *origins* embody a more coherent set of guiding assumptions than do the more recent variations to which it has been held captive³³⁰. As expressed by Catton and Dunlop in 1978, at a time when the sub-discipline was in its establishment phase:

Ostensibly diverse and competing theoretical perspectives in sociology are alike in their shared anthropocentrism. From any of these perspectives, therefore, much contemporary and future social experience has to seem anomalous. Environmental sociologists attempt to understand recent social changes by means of a non-anthropocentric paradigm. Because ecosystem constraints now pose serious problems both for human societies and for sociology, three assumptions quite different from the Human Exemptionalist Paradigm (HEP) have become essential. They form a New Environmental Paradigm (NEP). Sociologists who accept this New Environmental Paradigm have no difficulty appreciating the sociological relevance of variables traditionally excluded from sociology. The core of environmental sociology is, in fact, the study of interactions between environment and society. Recent work by NEP-oriented sociologists on issues pertaining to social stratification exemplifies the utility of this paradigm³³¹.

In its evolution, environmental sociology continues to make a significant contribution to debates that centre on human-nature interactions, yet it does so more usually from a discursive position, as opposed to one that engages

³²⁸ These criteria are covered in Chapter 5

³²⁹ See for example: The Society for Applied Anthropology. "What is Environmental Anthropology?" (<http://www.sfaa.net/eap/ea.html>); McGrath, Stacy (n.d) "Ecological Anthropology", M.D Murphy (ed.) *Anthropological Theories*. Department of Anthropology, University of Alabama, (<http://www.as.ua.edu/ant/Faculty/murphy/ecologic.htm>); Online Journal of Ecological Anthropology, University of South Florida (<http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~jea/Pages/issues-of-jea.html#Vol11>)

³³⁰ Woodgate, G. and Redclift, M. (1998), "From a 'Sociology of Nature' to Environmental Sociology: Beyond Social Construction", *Environmental Values* 7: pp.3-24

³³¹ Catton, W.R. jnr. and Dunlap, R.E., (1978), "Environmental Sociology: A New Paradigm", *The American Sociologist*, Volume 13 (February), pp. 41-49

with primary research processes. In effect, its evidentiary platform is by turns reliant on secondary research, or engaged by the more general features of environmental challenges. Quite apart from this, the various divisions within the sub-discipline - for example, between realists and constructivists³³² – draw attention away from the need to establish some guiding precepts, as was the case during the 1970's.

In relation to alternative approaches, there was, in large part, variable cross-disciplinary engagement, as with human ecology and ecofeminism³³³. Worthy though these approaches are, I did not want the research to be 'steered' away from the broader concerns outlined above. Rather, I wanted to establish a clear way forward through which I could incorporate all of the potential complexities that steer sustainability in practice (or not, as the case may be). That is, individual views and values, communal circumstances, human and other-species interaction, as well as geological, topographic and other features of the locale that may impact on particular initiatives or ways of living. Importantly, research of this kind is primarily *exploratory*, with an endpoint that is both *descriptive and explanatory*. Given that I did not want the exploration to be constrained by *prescribed* disciplinary parameters the research methodology needed to be crafted in such a way as to ensure that a host of *unknown* potentials could be factored *in*, not out.

In moving to consider the way in which such a methodology could be crafted I began with the conceptual framing. Explored in more depth in Chapter Five, the development of the communography relied upon the grounding tenets of social research generally, including sound ethical practice, informed consent, probity and transparency. Yet it also responded to the fact that qualitative research is generally deployed to capture more depth and be more descriptive than quantitative research³³⁴. In the process it is (usually) constrained by the

³³² See: Woodgate, G. & Redclift, M. (1998) 'From a 'Sociology of Nature' to Environmental Sociology: Beyond Social Construction', *Environmental Values*, no. 7, pp. 3-24

³³³ In the case of human ecology, see: Steiner, D. and M. Nauser (eds.) (1993) *Human Ecology: Fragments of Anti-fragmentary Views of the World*, Routledge, London and New York; "Human Ecology Forum 108", *Human Ecology Review* (2008), Vol. 15, No. 1 for coverage of interdisciplinary approaches and their place in informing the discipline.

³³⁴ Originating with Geertz, the notion that values, beliefs and actions are expressed through culture constitutes the starting point in eliciting themes from ethnographic research. Developed to elicit 'thick description', the ethnographic method was designed to provide

character of its substantive explorations, with the effect that the weight and relevance of broader empirical data to qualitative research is seldom brought to bear. This general tendency is evidenced in both formative and post-modern developments beyond ethnography and extends to phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, feminist methodologies, and postmodernism³³⁵. While some of these approaches do concern themselves with the relationship between the particular and the general – the individual and the social – they more usually engage with descriptive-explanatory accounts of individual and small group research in relation to specific social and cultural phenomena. Reference to the broader social milieu may be contextual, but seldom is it situated in direct relation to it. This is certainly the case with the evolution of ethnography, from its functionalist and structuralist roots in anthropology³³⁶, to its expanded applications in a host of disciplines, not least sociology³³⁷.

In relation to the substance of this thesis, these approaches, theories and methodologies do not, for the most part, currently address themselves to a more pressing concern. In particular, the need to establish a relationship between quantitative and qualitative research in order to capture a fuller view of the global and local dimensions of environmental-climatic threat. Currently underpinned by *aggregate* data that is captured quantitatively at the global, national, and sometimes regional level, we can specify the pervasive nature of CO₂ levels, climate change, species loss, deforestation and so on. In addition we can also collect, analyse and model the degree to which these challenges are anthropogenic. Yet what we cannot currently achieve is a more comprehensive understanding of the prevailing local-regional forces at work that impact or mitigate in the collective creation of those threats. In specific terms I am addressing the usually overlooked complex of human predilections that relate to values, aspirations, consumption patterns and

considerably more detail and depth about the individual and small-group in relation to social and cultural life. See: Geertz, C. (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York.

³³⁵ For a comprehensive account of these methodologies and their accompanying theoretical underpinnings see: Liamputtong, P. (2011), *op. cit.*, pp. 3-10

³³⁶ See, for example: Malinowski, B. (1933), *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Routledge, London; Mead, M. (1928), *Coming of Age in Samoa*, William Morrow, New York.

³³⁷ See: Sharkey, S. and Larsen, J.A. (2005), 'Ethnographic Exploration: Participation and Meaning in Everyday Life', in I. Holloway (ed.), *Qualitative Research in Health Care*, Open Institution of Higher Education Press, Berkshire

individual participation in local initiatives and isolating the fact that, to date, *none* of the global research on climate change has undertaken any of this (qualitative) work. The value of such a synthesis may well lie in the indicative data that small scale, locally based research initiatives provide – particularly in relation to the ways in which our individual values impact the ways in which we choose to live in the world.

Perhaps the best example of this potential is the practice of triangulation. As a well-established tool of social research generally its applications extend to the matching of quantitative methods (such as population surveys or scientific data) to qualitative methods (such as in-depth interviews). In the case of the quantitative method, generalizable results attributable to the broader population could be informed by the deeper meaning that emerges from qualitative methods. Assuming the alignment of questions and data fields in linked quantitative and qualitative research, this has the potential to provide far more information about social-communal processes, along with the forces that steer them. In addition, triangulation can be crafted to account for diverse cultures, regions, climatic and other conditions that apply in a range of settings. In the process it can be utilised to redesign quantitative research that had previously failed to account for the complexities of social life. In short, difference and diversity can be taken into account here, with the effect that a far more robust, accurate and nuanced rendering of social phenomena can be used to inform policy and planning³³⁸.

With these considerations in mind, Chapter Five presents a comprehensive account of the conceptual framework, along with the methodology and methods that were used to develop the communography.

³³⁸ See: Walter, M. (2010), *Social Research Methods* (2nd edn.) Oxford University Press, Victoria. pp. 24-27

Chapter 5

Methodology

Establishing the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framing of research that concerns itself with reality-producing engagements is, by definition, an ontological enterprise. The beliefs, values and intentions that underscore the ways in which we meet the world, and indeed, the ways in which we strive to sustain it, summon our skills as builders, makers and collaborators. More than this, they summon our *ways* of coming to know. Whilst our epistemologies carry us into this enterprise, the dynamic interaction of *what we know* and *how we know* leads inevitably to an ontological engagement with worlds that are constantly being made, unmade and remade. Separations here lie more in the realm of the ideational or notional than in the actual interactions that apply between species, elements and places; we can build fences, but seldom can we exclude or evict the interlopers. That is to say, the spaces and places that we occupy as human beings are subject to unending movement, change and transformation. To the flux of these processes we must add the species and elements that occupy both built and natural environments.

Reconciling the tensions that apply when natural-human-other is disentangled or de-coupled necessarily demanded strong consideration in the development of a research methodology that would speak to the issues of community sustainability in its fullness. By extension, the need to develop an inclusive architecture about which a sound research process could be built led in the general direction of constructivism, particularly because of its potential to offer a level of fit between the various elements of the research (human-nature-environment). Given this initial engagement, a more detailed exploration of constructivism, along with its strengths and limits, was indicated.

A familiar conceptualisation within the social sciences generally, its more specific applications have arisen within sociologies of scientific knowledge (SSK), the social construction of technology (SCOT) and social constructivism

generally³³⁹. In many respects these variants of constructivism have contributed significantly to discourse that centres on the nature of reality, as well as the reality-producing elements of social life. As a counterforce to scientific determinism, constructivism has made some meaningful challenge, particularly with regard to notions of 'proof' and 'truth'. Here, the linear or hierarchical order that emerges when Science 'proves' its theories on the basis of limited engagements, has led constructivists to resituate the arrival of a particular scientific advance within the milieu in which it arises. This becomes critically important when contained, laboratory-based 'developments' are released into far more complex environments. The examples here abound: DDT, CFC's, phosphates, along with a range of medical applications that do their work on *isolated systems*, whilst simultaneously distorting the context and *functioning of the whole* in which they become immersed³⁴⁰.

In effect, exposing the delusion that Science can capture and develop facts-in-isolation disrupts the closed-court of its legitimacy. Accordingly, the rubric of rationality is peeled back to reveal the hegemonic nature of its claims³⁴¹. Yet that said, social constructivism and its attendant variations can themselves be limited by the degree to which *the social* stands prominent in the shaping of material worlds. More to the point, social constructivism can at times be situated as equally deterministic precisely because the cast of reality is formed by the *social* context in which it is located. Needless to say, this impasse gives rise to high-octane debates between scientists, realists (materialists) and constructivists, manifest in claim and counter-claim discourse about what constitutes reality, along with the ways in which it is 'produced'³⁴².

³³⁹ Law, J. & Singleton, V. (2000) "Performing technologies stories: On Social Constructivism, Performance and Performativity", *Technology and Culture*, 41, pp. 765-766

³⁴⁰ See for example: van Emden, H.F. and Peakall, D.B (eds) (1999), *Beyond Silent Spring: Integrated Pest Management and Chemical Safety*, UNEP, ICIPE, Chapman & Hall, London - a joint project initiated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE). Review available in *Integrated Pest Management Reviews* 4: 269-272, 1999.

³⁴¹ Stengers, I. (2012), "Reclaiming Animism", *e-flux journal*, No. 36, July, p.2

³⁴² See: Law, J. & Singleton, V. (2000) "Performing technologies stories: On Social Constructivism, Performance and Performativity", *Technology and Culture*, 41 and Latour, B. (2003), *The promises of constructivism*, in Idhe, D. (ed.), *Chasing Technology: Matrix of Materiality*, Indiana Series for the Philosophy of Science, Indiana University Press

Discourse and debates about the value of constructivism have infused such disciplines as environmental sociology³⁴³, critical realism³⁴⁴, the philosophy of science³⁴⁵, science studies and others³⁴⁶, yet a more recent challenge has been taken up by one of its own protagonists.

Challenging the idea of Agency

In the broader social-political-environmental context the idea of human agency is seldom accounted for in the wide-ranging debates that accompany environmental degradation. As noted in Chapter One, Latour contributes significantly to extending our awareness of a force inimical to climatic degradation, yet his exposition of the disciplinary limitations that accompany the idea of human agency is equally telling and salient to this work.

With regard to constructivism, Latour³⁴⁷ sets out to discard the social as qualifier in the reclamation of the constructed. Echoing the content of his earlier cited work he throws up an overdue challenge to the ways in which various academic disciplines assert the notion of human agency. This is particularly ironic, given Latour's long-held commitment to constructivism. Indeed, in this critical exploration he argues against his own original 'constructions' of what constructivism means and establishes some hope of reframing the meaning attributed to it, with the effect that it emerges as a more organic formulation - one that attributes meaning to the interactivity of human, material, technological and scientific. Rather than through the isolation of each case, it is to the relational dynamic between them that constructivism must look. That is to say, constructivism emerges as a qualified and redefined concept that does not assert the primacy of the human 'maker' or 'constructor'. Instead it captures something of the

³⁴³ Irwin, A (2001), 'Society, Nature, Knowledge: Co-constructing the Social and the Natural', in *Sociology and the Environment: A Critical Introduction to Society, Nature and Knowledge*, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 161-187

³⁴⁴ Forsyth, T. in Stainer, A. and Lopez, G. (eds) (2001) *After postmodernism: critical realism?* Athlone Press, London, pp. 146-154

³⁴⁵ Stengers, I. (2008) "A Constructivist Reading of *Process and Reality*", *Theory Culture Society* 2008 25: 91

³⁴⁶ Law, J. & Singleton, V. (2000) "Performing technologies stories: On Social Constructivism, Performance and Performativity", *Technology and Culture*, 41, pp. 765-775

³⁴⁷ Latour, B. (2003) 'The promises of constructivism', Paper prepared for a chapter in Don Ihde (editor), *Chasing Technology: Matrix of Materiality*, Indiana Series for the Philosophy of Science, Indiana University Press, pp. 2-5.

dialectical movement between states of order, development, emergence and incorporation as they manifest in multiple-species worlds that are constructed through interplay, not isolated command or agency.

While Latour's more abstract discourse has its value, especially with regard to the ways in which we apprehend reality, Isabelle Stengers³⁴⁸ turns toward animism as a vehicle through which some reclamation process might take place. As a point of clarification, animism as she explores it extends to those features of life that animate our explorations and endeavours, rather than the more specific cosmologies that invest visceral forces with a causal or originary quality that enlivens the world in some invisible and indiscernible fashion. Here she draws on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in contrasting the differentiated hierarchies of *fact* with the rhizomatic quality of *belief*.

For Stengers, the rhizomatic metaphor expresses lateral connections that produce 'heterogeneous practices, concerns, and ways of giving meaning to the inhabitants of this earth, with none being privileged and any being liable to connect with any other'. In the process, the nature of 'belief' constitutes an ecological anarchy, 'because...connections *must* be produced. They are events, linkages – like symbiosis. They are what is and what will remain heterogeneous'³⁴⁹.

Stengers does not dispatch Science generally, yet she is critical of the degree to which it generally naturalises its evidence as fact. In the process it discards anything that smacks of mere *belief*, irrespective of its value in establishing linkages between aspects of all life. Here she challenges the idea that if the particular belief cannot be detained and captured by Science, then the tests that produce both proof and truth are not satisfied. Consequently, belief, or the animating force of connection to something other than the stuff of Science, is cast off as inconsequential in the grander scheme of reality making.

³⁴⁸ Stengers, I. (2012) 'Reclaiming Animism', *e-flux journal*, No. 36, July, p.2

³⁴⁹ Stengers, I. (2012) 'Reclaiming Animism', *e-flux journal*, No. 36, July, pp. 2-3

Importantly, Stengers locates Science with a capital S as a general conquest bent on translating everything that exists into objective, rational knowledge. By contrast, small-s science 'requires thinking in terms of an adventure...'³⁵⁰. In situating the small-s sciences as adventures, Stengers makes the point that 'achievements' within their various domains arise through their enrolment in partner-relations with the subjects of their explorations. That is, the relation between scientist and respondent is entangled, non-linear and not necessarily subject to the privilege or provenance of either science or scientist. In short, 'things' enact their being in relation, not isolation. More to the point, they do not always express a behaviour or characteristic mode of being that performs in line with structured parameters.

The Ontological Nature of Social Research

In an extensive exploration of constructivism, Law and Singleton³⁵¹ expose some contrasting approaches. In relation to SSK (sociologies of scientific knowledge) and SCOT (the social construction of technology) they note a level of avoidance by constructivists in accepting the 'performative consequences of their own work'. In this they are critical of the way that these discrete variants of constructivism uncouple their constructions of research findings from those that they seek to describe. By implication, the *performance* (or enactment) of reality is as much about the ways in which it is described and defined, as by those elements of it that supposedly stand beyond the reach of the researcher. As they note, ...'to tell techno-science stories is, in some measure or other, to perform techno-science realities'.³⁵²

More broadly, the performance of social science research that extends beyond the techno-scientific speaks to the ontological politics of the research process itself. Contextualising the 'power of social science and its methods', Law and Urry note that '...the social-and-physical changes in the world are – and need to be – paralleled by changes in the methods of social inquiry.' By implication,

³⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 2-3

³⁵¹ Law, J. & Singleton, V. (2000) 'Performing technologies stories: On Social Constructivism, Performance and Performativity', *Technology and Culture*, 41, p. 767

³⁵² *ibid.*, p.767

‘the social sciences need to re-imagine themselves, their methods and, indeed, their worlds if they are to work productively in the twenty-first century’³⁵³

One of the driving forces in this discourse about social inquiry is the degree to which it has been held in the thrall of ‘nineteenth century, nation-state based politics’³⁵⁴. According to Law and Urry, the degree to which this has been an embedded characteristic surfaces in its ongoing reproduction. In many respects this resonates with the view that the social sciences can and do fall into the trap of deterministic or relativistic conceptualisations, such that they reproduce the artifice of their big-S Science cohorts.

In expanding constructivism to the level of an inclusive concept, the ontological nature of research is more readily apprehended. That is to say, the *nature of co-created reality*, as opposed to theorizing that *delineates* various knowledge streams about it, becomes more fully available. Irwin³⁵⁵, in his challenge to develop a level of theoretical pluralism with regard to the social-natural divide, sees the need for the social sciences to re-couple the more usually isolated fields of society and nature, particularly in dealing with the pressing challenges that arise for both. Clearly, the separations between them diminish and limit the degree of any meaningful engagement in either sphere. More to the point, perhaps, the generalizable configurations embedded in internationalised agendas carry binaries and separations between human and other in ways that limit the reconciliation of both. As he notes:

The whole thrust of the co-constructivist concept is towards the recognition that environmental matters overlap and interconnect with a diversity of social practices. In that way also, it is possible to surmise that environmental change will be a product of a whole range of social practices and not simply of intentional environmental engagement. *The international agenda of sustainability may not in the end be as important as smaller changes in social practice that cumulatively and undramatically change our world.* Whilst it is relatively easy to focus on high-profile environmental decisions, the incremental shifts of industry, institutional politics and wider publics may ultimately have greater socio-environmental impact.³⁵⁶

[Emphasis added]

³⁵³ Law, J. & Urry, J. (2004) ‘Enacting the Social’, *Economy and Society*, 33, p. 390

³⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 391

³⁵⁵ Irwin, A (2001) ‘Society, Nature, Knowledge: Co-constructing the Social and the Natural’, in *Sociology and the Environment: A Critical Introduction to Society, Nature and Knowledge*, Chapter 7, Polity Press, Cambridge

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.162

What these critical explorations expose is the interplay between the forces at work that do the constructing of reality. On the one hand we deal with what is given – a material environment, say, or an ecosystem, or a species population - on the other we confront a polity that carries belief, reason and context into transformative relations that combine to become emergent qualities that constitute *co-constructions* and *versions* of reality. For the sceptic, a point of reference that reasserts the value of collaborative construction (co-construction) and exposes the limits of truth and proof: Newton and gravity, whilst secure at ground zero, are dislodged beyond it by Einstein's general theory of relativity. In each case there exists a level of substantive proof to efficacy and application, yet both pertain to quite specific contexts. The one does not negate the other, but neither can it include it, given the specific conditions within which it will apply. On Earth, at ground zero, gravity performs, enacts, resolves. What goes up will come down. Now to the heavens: breach the gravitational field of the planet and not only will the 'up' not come 'down' of its own volition, it will have to be violently propelled, against its will, to comply. Should propulsion fail, so the fall will be reconfigured as 'drift' – up and out and gone, breaching every certainty that was ever invested in *old science*.

In relation to the development of this thesis, it has not been my intention to dispel the value and efficacy of *all-science*, yet it is nonetheless important to situate the sciences beside their counterparts, particularly because of the ways in which the one can be informed by the other. Importantly, if the beliefs and values that occupy social-natural contexts are excluded from the interplay of complex systems then the central requirement of coherence is lost. That is, we are individually and collectively steered by both knowledge and beliefs, along with the values ascribed to both.

In drawing on the stock of this work my purpose has been to develop the means by which community sustainability might be *re-searched*. As a starting point, community is described by what it includes, rather than by what it excludes. Here, sustainability is coupled with the complexity of its local contexts, and in the process accounted for through the multivariate ways in which it is performed. Rather than homogenising through definition the term

‘community sustainability’, I have chosen to engage with, rather than avoid, interpretations and constructions of sustainability that express the complex interactions that occur between place, species and the knowledge and values that give some effect to the ways in which sustainability is performed.

The development of a conceptual framework within which this process could be articulated owes much to the philosophical-scientific dimension articulated above, but also to the social sciences. In particular, the ontological and performative dimensions of community sustainability, as well as the constructed nature of social and other worlds. As indicated, I have avoided the more usual attribution of *social* and instead engage with Stenger’s co-constructivist approach, which develops a synthesis of the social and material as interactive and relationally dynamic.

In aligning the substantive theoretical-conceptual value of the works cited above, the communographic approach was crafted to fit the broadened human-natural context. Beginning with the Research Design, the following section deals more explicitly with the Methodology and Methods that were applied to the primary research.

The Research Design

Given the qualitative, ontological nature of this work, an *exploratory research design* was developed. Supported by the co-constructivist framework articulated above, the engagement with co-created worlds³⁵⁷ constitutes an exploration of both individual responses to the meaning of sustainability, along with the ways in which individuals develop and engage with initiatives that are representative of sustainability from their point of view.

Accordingly, the following research questions and aims were developed.

Research Questions

1. What **meaning** does sustainability hold at the individual level?
2. What **personal values** inform individual views of community life and its sustainability?
3. What **guiding precepts or intentions** help activate specific, individual engagements in community life?

In alignment with the Research Questions the following Aims were developed.

Research Aims

1. To capture the range of **personal-subjective meanings** attributed to sustainability by individual participants in specified community settings
2. To render the range of **personal values** that inform views of community life and its sustainability
3. To locate the **guiding precepts or personal intentions** of individuals that drive identifiable engagements in the sustainability of community life

³⁵⁷ Walter, M. (2010) op. cit., pp. 32-35

Importantly, the research questions and aims were designed to elicit not just individual responses to these issues, but also a fuller rendering of the spatial-geographic settings in which the research took place. The intention here was to enable a performative exploration, one that would open a portal into the reality-producing elements about which sustainability is enacted. That is, concerned not only with the people who contributed to the research, the performative was also applied to the ways in which the non-human and topographical features of local life produce and reconfigure the ways in which environments are read. This dynamic relation is, in its way, the performance of an ensemble of actors – some human, others not. The repertory of that performance says as much about the ways in which sustainability takes the stage as the solitary human beings who strive to ensure that the health of their lifeworld endures. By implication, the research questions and aims implicate both built and natural environments, which must, as far as possible, be incorporated into the research.

In turning to the Methodology and Methods, the performative-ontological nature of the research is discussed in relation to decisions that had to be made with regard to the representation of both people and place. Thereafter, a full account of the development of the communography is presented, along with the methods that were developed to support it.

Methodology and Methods

In clarifying the performative turn in social science, especially with regard to orthodox qualitative research, Roberts notes that:

...social science requires a conception of qualitative research that disrupts the traditional notion of the research process (not only its end point in reportage)...The stages can be mixed, distinctions between researcher, "subjects" and audiences disturbed - research becomes a flexible, recursive process with its "end" less definable. Instead of the written text - and culture as a "text" to be written-interpreted by the researcher-interpreter, there is a less clear but more open approach. The "performative" can bring to bear many different forms of understanding and representation...

For a performative social science ... there is also the promise of relating text and the visual, sound and voice in many forms. The "materials" of research to be investigated or constructed, interpreted and reviewed, discussed and represented are opened beyond the transcribed interview text and field note observations...³⁵⁸

Given these considerations, the development of a research methodology that could carry the co-constructed performance of various realities was a central requirement of the research. By implication, a space had to be created within which the non-human 'other' could take its place. Accordingly, a digital rendering of the research seemed imperative.

In pursuing this method I note Roberts earlier observations which extend to transformations in anthropology. Here he reiterates the claims of visual anthropologists that their predecessors had been engaged in a "word-driven", monomedia, to the detriment of a more multisensory approach³⁵⁹. This is particularly salient in the context of contemporary social research, especially because of the prevalence of multi-media more generally. Visual methods are not new to social science, and their multiple forms are generally adapted to fit the contexts within which they are developed³⁶⁰. In addition, they bring to bear a variety of aesthetic orientations and genres³⁶¹.

³⁵⁸ Roberts, B., (2008) 'Performative Social Science: A Consideration of Skills, Purpose and Context', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (FQS), Vol. 9, No. 2, Art. 58, May, pp. 7-8

³⁵⁹ Roberts, Roberts, B. (2008), op. cit.

³⁶⁰ See: Holm, G. (2008), "Photography as Performance", *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Art 38, May

³⁶¹ See: Seale, C., Gobo, G., Gudrium, J. and Silverman, D. (2008), "Qualitative Research Practice", *Sage Research Methods Online* Issue 23, Visual Methods; Hurworth, R. (2003), "Photo-Interviewing for Research", *Social Research Update*, Issue 40; Butler, S. (2008), "Performance, Art and Ethnography", *FQS: Forum: Qualitative Research*, Vol. 9., No. 2, Art 34.; Holm, G. (2008), "Photography as Performance", *FQS: Forum: Qualitative Research*, Vol. 9., No. 2, Art 38; Pink, S. (2004), "Visual Methods", *Sage Research Methods Online*.

Given these considerations I looked to the ways in which social research represents itself. That is, to the ways that various conceptual-methodological approaches are named and enacted. As earlier noted, in the case of ethnography and the substrate variants that have characterised its development, the consistent inflection tends toward the human³⁶². In considering the need for an accurately named methodology that would convey the scope and orientation of the primary research I elected to develop a communographic approach. That is, in place of the intended reflexive ethnography I adopted the term communography.

Whilst this methodology has no disciplinary pedigree it clearly conveys the locus of the research, and also intimates the focus. More to the point, in its characterisation it develops *equivalence* between all elements of community – human, natural and built environments, multiple species and so on – rather than *selective emphasis*.

With regard to the primary research process, the communography shares some of the elements of ethnography, in particular, the need for a reflexive approach, as well as the imperative of being resident in each of the community sites for the duration of the research. In relation to reflexivity, Crouch registers a concern with research ‘process’, rather than product. Here, reflexive practice ‘makes demands on the researcher to take account of the many ways they themselves influence research findings and thus what comes to be accepted as knowledge’³⁶³ By implication, any researcher influence on participants demands a self aware approach, yet often overlooked is the need to take account of the influence of research participants on the researcher. This is, in my view, an inherent and necessary feature of reflexive practice.

³⁶² See: Sponsel L. (2004), *Ecological Anthropology* (http://www.eoearth.org/article/Ecological_anthropology); Bingham, N., Blowers, A. & Belshaw, C., (eds.) (2003), *Contested Environments* (1st ed.), John Wiley & Sons, United Kingdom; Richardson, L. (2000), “Evaluating ethnography”, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(2), 253-255

³⁶³ Crouch, C. (2007) ‘Praxis and the reflexive creative practitioner’, *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 6, p. 109

The following section accounts for the development of the communographic framework and is followed by a discussion of the methods that were designed to support it.

The Communographic Framework

The inclusive rendering of community sustainability that informs this work responded to the fact that while the geographic contexts would be diverse, the nature of community life in each of these settings would rest upon common or equivalent elements that included **defined localities, ongoing resident populations** and **the absence of state interventions or initiatives**.

In addition, the research required a sampling frame and criteria that would, as far as possible, ensure a level of equivalent status in each of the communities in so far as the human dimension is concerned. Outlined below are the community criteria that were applied. This is followed by an account of the sampling frame.

Community Criteria

1. The communities are identifiable, named and characterised by a current and on-going resident population

Implied here is the need for the communities to be validated as current residential localities that host ongoing human and other species populations.

2. None of the communities is subject to current state interventions or initiatives in the general domain of sustainability

This criterion was particularly significant to the research because it reflects the fact that the vast majority of communities throughout the world exist as localities that are not supported or sustained by state sponsorship or interventions.

3. None of the communities has been engaged in social research with regard to sustainability

As is often the case with primary research, the issue of 'contamination' or 'research fatigue' tends to influence the ways in which individuals engage (or not). This can limit or contaminate research and as a result nullify or diminish the authenticity of outcomes or results.

4. Each of the communities is separated by distinct social, cultural and economic histories

Here, the need to overturn any assumptions that are carried through familiarity arises as a central principle of the research. Quite apart from the intention to open the process to new ways of seeing and engaging with sustainability, it was important to capture the ways in which various histories and cultural influences inform individual values and intentions. Here, the diversity of values that apply to disparate communities may hold some important information with regard to historical effects that register within the present.

5. The presence of broader environmental features – including topography, geology, flora and fauna – will be included in any rendering of community sustainability.

Implied here is the development of digital artefacts that will capture all environmental features of each community and constitute an embedded feature of the thesis.

The Sampling Frame

Given the qualitative nature of this research, a convenience sample³⁶⁴ was developed that included the general population characteristics of:

Gender – a gender balance between male and female participants was aimed for in all community settings.

Inter-generational representation – a mix of research participants in the 30-50 and 50-70 year cohorts in all settings.

The application of a convenience sample responds to the ‘open’ status of sustainability as it is applied here and relates directly to the fact that *specific* population characteristics are not under investigation. Rather, I wanted to engage with the many and varied *forms* in which sustainability arises in communities and so made no prescriptive formulations about the characteristics of participants. That said, I did consider it important to account for the issues of gender and generational representation because I did not want to skew the sample toward a particular cohort.

While there are alternative sampling frames that could have been applied, I chose to avoid them, largely because they had the potential to distort the research. In the case of snowball sampling, research participants are asked to suggest or refer other prospective interviewees. While this is appropriate in some circumstances, in the context of this research it may have restricted the exploration to people of like mind who share similar beliefs and values. In relation to purposive sampling, specific population groups are targeted based on particular characteristics. Once again, this research did not specify any such prescribed markers³⁶⁵.

³⁶⁴ Walter, M. (2010), op. cit., p. 137

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 138

Research Methods

The research methods articulated below were designed to ensure that linkages between the research questions and aims would be addressed consistently across all research sites and in all interviews with participants.

In addition, they were crafted to ensure that the co-constructivist framing of the communography incorporated built and natural environments as part of the research process itself. By implication, the research methods include interviews with participants, along with specific methods for representing their contributions as well as with the environments that they occupied.

1. Informal on-site engagement and relationship building

The engagement of participants was undertaken informally, rather than through a structured recruitment process. Wherever possible I responded to people as I met them through the ordinary process of moving through communities. In most cases an easy exchange would take place and I always disclosed that I was undertaking research into community sustainability. In every case this resulted in a more expanded discussion, and where appropriate I asked people if they would like to participate. On some occasions this approach was not possible, as a consequence I allowed myself to be drawn to places of interest (usually buildings) that held some prospect of inclusion in the research. For example, in one case I walked into a hotel largely because it had a series of solar panels on its roof. On other occasions I met research participants through simply asking questions of those I met along the way.

My reason for adopting this approach lies with the conceptual framing of the research, along with the ways in which it informs the methodology and methods. Some brief reiteration of Isabelle Stengers' *Ecology of Practices*³⁶⁶ is warranted here, particularly, her reference to Gilles Deleuze exhortation to think 'par le milieu'; that is, to think within the middle and the surrounding habitat.' In my case, this meant situating myself *within* various research environments and engaging more organically with people than would otherwise have been the case.

³⁶⁶ Stengers, I. (2005) 'An ecology of practices', *Cultural Studies Review*, Vol.11 (1): 183-196

2. Presence in Community – Unobtrusive observation

The informality of establishing initial contact with people supports the idea that research processes demand our full presence in the settings and contexts we occupy. Being fully present, or stilling the need to be constantly preoccupied by the *particular who* and *what* of our searches, was central here. The simple act of walking, or real-time movement through a community, enabled a fuller meeting with environments, species and people.

In its way this process constitutes an unobtrusive method that enables a fuller reading of both people and place³⁶⁷. In the context of most social research it is applied to the observation of people. In relation to this research it was equally concerned with built and natural environments. Importantly, it assisted in authenticating some of the comments that participants made in interview about the various environments they occupied.

An additional consideration that I took into account in relation to this method concerns the business of interviewing participants, which relied upon the will to be as informed as possible about the character of the locale. While there are occasions when this is not possible, the act of walking through a community, while observing and listening, is an invaluable way of gathering some of the more visceral or nuanced features of community life that so often get overlooked in favour of too much focus on the more orthodox elements of research. It also signals a level of connection and interest that validates the contributions of participants.

3. Informal Conversational Interview

The notion of informal engagement has its obvious benefits and I extended this feature of the communography to the interview process. Following the engagement process and observational methods that were applied initially, I ensured that the research questions led the interview. Thereafter, I followed any lines of discussion that related to participants' own concerns, interests or initiatives that were relevant to the research.

³⁶⁷ See: Liamputtong, P. (2011), pp. 87-106 for a full discussion of the various ways in which unobtrusive methods are applied in social research

This approach had the potential to create a level of flow and consistency between initial meetings and the research interviews that would follow.

As a secondary feature of the interview process, the majority of questions were framed in the present. I took this course to ensure that 'memory' did not take hold of the process. My reasons for limiting memory from the capture of sustainability rest with the fact that it can, at times, be idealised or partial. By contrast, the present can be rendered more authentically through direct and sometimes physical registers. Where some contributors referred to the past, particularly as it resonated with the present, the line of recall in its relation to the issues under discussion was adopted. By this means, the *presence of the past* was given its space in a more organic fashion and used as a springboard to register any current or ongoing impacts.

As an example of the way in which this was applied, questions followed the present tense wherever possible:

"So, you live in ...How long have you been here?"

"What does sustainability mean from your point of view?"

"What sustains you personally?"

4. Accurate Representation: Analysis and 'evidence'

While it is certainly the case that data analysis, along with systems that frame data gathering, can in some cases generate what might broadly be designated as evidence³⁶⁸, at the community level *information* that results in a fuller engagement with the locale must be concerned with the intricate interplay of individual and communal forces.

In relation to the primary research that informs this work, I took the position that research outcomes that flowed from various and diverse contexts could not be conflated under the rubric of 'evidence'. Rather, they constituted a *representation* of individual contributions. As indicated in Part One, agency is an emergent and contingent quality. For that reason, 'coupled human and natural systems' must be considered in their very real complexity. By implication, research outcomes are context-specific and do not, in my view,

³⁶⁸ See, for example, Laimputtong, P. (2011), op. cit., pp. 292-296

form the basis of any claims with regard to a *more generalizable representativeness*, or indeed to *transferability*.

With regard to qualitative primary research more generally, the business of representing participant contributions and research outcomes can become contentious, especially when research data are subjected to analysis from which 'evidence' is (allegedly) constructed. This issue goes to the heart of what constitutes evidence in qualitative research and warrants some closer examination.

In an extensive review, Freeman *et al*³⁶⁹ address the complex interplay of various paradigmatic and theoretical-conceptual challenges that apply here. Their overarching challenge addresses the shift currently underway in many academic institutions that strives to reinstall 'science' in the conduct of social research. The largely positivist frame that applies here has been mandated into law by the US Government, and is supported by the National Research Council. As they note:

With the NRC prepared to define evidence and the American Educational Research Association imposing standards for reporting on research methods in its publications, qualitative researchers may feel under siege. Top down efforts such as these to legislate scientific practice and mandate research design threaten to harden the boundaries of what counts as science, to devalue many qualitative research endeavours, and to limit creative research practice of all kinds.³⁷⁰

As the authors establish, there is a high need for the various disciplinary streams that engage in qualitative research to '...avoid consensus about or prescribe standards of evidence in this diverse field. Such prescriptions...amount to disciplinary action that constrain the generation of knowledge rather than improve it'³⁷¹.

Beyond the specific case example provided here, qualitative research has from time to time been engaged in processes that were directed at legitimising its place in the broader practicum of social research. While the means by which

³⁶⁹ Freeman, M., de Marrais, K., Preissle, J., Roulston, K. and St. Pierre, E. (2007), "Standards of Evidence in Qualitative Research: An incitement to Discourse", *Educational Researcher*, Vol.

36, No. 5, pp. 25-32

³⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 25

³⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 25

this was attempted are variable, the example cited above echoes the turn to 'science' that has activated some very real problems for social research generally. Grounded Theory exemplifies the point, to the degree that its claims-making posture rests on an avowedly positivist frame. In particular, Grounded Theory is deployed in qualitative research in order to generate 'theory' based on 'data' drawn from small population samples that are usually non-representative. Widely deployed, yet now more frequently critiqued, the notion that a 'theory' can be developed from such small-sample research raises issues of context and meaning, in addition to the more usual challenge about the meaning of theory itself.

In an extensive review, Thomas and James³⁷² follow the trajectory of Grounded Theory, which began in the 1960's, at a time when qualitative research was suffering a decline '... principally due to pincer-like pressure from ...the "hard" methods such as statistical method and structural functionalism on the one hand, and competition from the "soft" side in the form of ethnomethodology ... on the other'³⁷³. In many respects the project was successful and they note that through the foundational work of Glaser and Strauss ... 'there can be little doubt that it has been a major - perhaps the major - contributor to the acceptance of the legitimacy of qualitative methods in applied social research.

Yet the limitations of Grounded Theory are seldom as closely scrutinized by those who deploy it and extend to four key areas. The first '...concerns the effect of highlighting the immediately apparent and observable at the expense of attending to the interweaving of structural features of social situations with activities'. The second, concerns the 'focus on the here and now of everyday encounters' (which) limits the concept of power that is possible in the approach.' The third challenges the development of *theory* in a grounded theory approach, which should be *guided* by data rather than limited by it. Finally, '...the insistence that grounded theory should be recognizable to the people studied (encapsulated in the notions of 'fit' and 'relevance') places unhelpful constraints on analysis because it rules out features and

³⁷² Thomas, G. and James, D. (2006) 'Reinventing grounded theory: some questions about theory, ground and discovery', *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 6, December, p. 767

³⁷³ op. cit., p. 767

interpretations which they could not be expected to have considered³⁷⁴.

As the authors note:

...far from providing the epistemic security promised by grounded theory, these notions - embodied in continuing reinventions of grounded theory - constrain and distort qualitative inquiry, and that what is contrived is not in fact theory in any meaningful sense, that 'ground' is a misnomer when talking about interpretation and that what ultimately materializes following grounded theory procedures is less like discovery and more akin to invention. The procedures admittedly provide signposts for qualitative inquirers, but...researchers should be wary, for the significance of interpretation, narrative and reflection can be undermined in the procedures of grounded theory³⁷⁵.

What is clear from the examples cited above is that while the place and prominence of 'data' and 'data analysis' in social research is well established, it often comes at the expense of *a full and accurate representation* of participant contributions. In that regard, these salutary cautions take us back to the very 'source' from which we purportedly draw our data, and while it is necessary to generate a framework within which research can be structured and analysed, the claims attributable to data alone often times stand in isolation from the people and places that ground our research.

With these things in mind I was less inclined to work toward 'data analysis' as a feature of this research, instead opting to ensure the *representative* capture of individual responses to questions about beliefs, intentions and activities. On that basis I chose to elicit *themes* that emerged from interview.

5. Themes

In acknowledging that interview content in social research is characteristically descriptive I sought to develop a framework within which I could capture any significant iterations of sustainability, along with the meaning and values that drove particular activities or initiatives. Accordingly, the process that was designed to elicit themes involved five stages and took place after all interviews had been completed³⁷⁶. It also followed standard social research practice³⁷⁷.

³⁷⁴ op. cit., p. 769

³⁷⁵ op. cit., p. 768

³⁷⁶ Note that all interviews were sound recorded

³⁷⁷ See: Walter, M. (2010), op cit., pp. 418-423; Laimputong, P. (2010), op. cit., pp. 277-286

Stage One: Editing Sound Files

All interviews were voice-recorded and transferred to sound files.

Editing complete sound files was undertaken so that they contained relevant interview material that related to all elements of the research. That is, responses to direct questions posed by the researcher, along with any other relevant information that arose in conversation.

Stage Two: Transcribing interview content

This process was extensive and involved listening to and transcribing interview content.

Stage Three: Coding

Coding the content of interviews involved the identification of responses to specific questions, as well as any significant additions that were provided by participants. Content was recorded in initial notes that supported the development of coding categories. For example, specific questions about what sustainability meant from an individual contained a lot of detail that was framed in conceptual categories such as *connection to place*, *human relationship building*, and so on

Stage Four: Themes

The themes that emerged from the coding process constitute an array of conceptually grounded areas of interest and involvement. As such, the themes are directly concerned with explaining and accounting for responses to questions. In addition, the themes enable a level of interpretation with regard to values, beliefs and intentions and the ways in which they inform initiatives or activities in the community setting.

Stage Five: Final Edit

A final sound edit was specifically designed to capture the *themes* that emerged from the coding process. Original, un-edited voice recordings were retained in the event that any content escaped scrutiny.

Stage Six: Participant Feedback

Participant feedback involved checking that the actual voiced content of interviews was an accurate representation of contributions.

This practice is not always considered in the conduct of primary research but I regarded it as an element of ethical practice that should be installed wherever possible. Quite apart from the obvious need to ensure accuracy, people who contribute to our research endeavours do not always get to access them.

(Note: It was not possible in all cases to reach participants and confirm the accuracy of the final cut of the sound edit. For that reason I ensured that I began by editing the sound files of people who were available to review them. This ensured that I would develop a more critical level of practice before commencing on edits of those who could not be contacted. In those cases where respondents were available all affirmed the accuracy of the final-edit sound files.)

6. Researcher Commentary: Reflexivity

My impressions of place, people and habitat constitute a contribution of sorts in that they take up the earlier observations by Law and Urry³⁷⁸ about the ontological politics of social research. That is, our very methods, along with the theoretical ballast and orthodoxies that steer us, play their part in forming the actual 'ground' of our researches. Given that this implies the need for balance and reflexivity, a more pressing challenge exists. In particular, the need to bring into the frame, wherever relevant, the extent to which we influence the research we undertake *and also* to account for the influence of participants on the researcher and research process.

³⁷⁸ Law and Urry (2004),

7. Development of a Digital Artefact

In so far as the digital artefact is concerned, it was designed as an embedded feature of the thesis in order to extend the engagement with communities that formed the focus of the primary research. It achieved this in three ways. Firstly, it provided an opportunity to *re-present* communities of place in a more sensory manner than would have been achieved solely through a written textual rendering. Secondly, representative excerpts of interview were incorporated into the artefact in order to convey the more nuanced features of interview that are sometimes lost in the transition to text. Thirdly, built and natural environments became an incorporate part of the overall text through their visual presence.

In determining the actual form of the artefact I was faced with two considerations. The first concerns (human) research participants and their right to be portrayed in a manner that was not only respectful, but also recognizable to them. Secondly, I was concerned to ensure that the actual content of interviews retained its meaning as it was incorporated into a different medium.

In addressing these issues I resolved to use still photography, rather than moving images, in the development of the artefact. I also wanted to ensure that, as far as possible, the content of interviews was matched to images that conveyed that content. For example, when participants spoke about specific elements of the built or natural environment I would endeavour to match those elements to their voiced contributions. Finally, I took the view that the 'stillness' of images has the potential to establish a sensory dialectic between sound and image. That is, the presence of sound (voice) does, in my view, receive more attention when the image is 'held' by the eye. This stills-and-voice form also supports the fact that many (probably most) readers will not be familiar with these research sites, and in that regard, the form of the artefact fits the purpose for which it was designed in that it enables a slower 'reading' of the imagery and sound.

In acknowledging the impetus to combine still photography and sound I note that the artefact may exhibit all of the qualities of a more orthodox 'slide-show', and in that regard it is unremarkable. In choosing not to render the visual-auditory dimension of the research in a more 'creative' form, I note Roberts' reference to Foster in relation to these issues as they pertain to the relation between anthropology and art:

"some critics of anthropology developed a kind of artist envy ... the artist became a paragon of formal reflexivity, a self-aware reader of *culture understood as text*. But is the artist the exemplar here, or is this figure not a projection of an ideal ego of the anthropologist: the anthropologist as collagist, semiologist, avant-gardist. In other words, might this artist envy be a self-idealization in which the anthropologist is remade as an artistic interpreter of the cultural text?"³⁷⁹

My own contention is that while some level of 'creative opportunity' may be lost to a more orthodox rendering, the reverse can also hold true. That is, the compelling use of 'art' in its various forms can inadvertently distort the 'focus' of primary research. Rather than leading readers toward a more substantive engagement, the overlay of aesthetically stylized form can detract from the contributions that participants make. In that regard, I reiterate my earlier concerns, in particular, the need to ensure that those who contribute so generously to our endeavours actually *recognize themselves and the substance of their lives* in our work.

It is important to note here that I was responsible for the vast majority of photographic images that appear in the artefact. While it is preferable to include participants by enabling them to take their own photographs, this was not possible in most cases. The reasons for this relate to the fact that research was undertaken in Scotland during the busy tourist season. All participants had work commitments that precluded further time off. In the case of Australia, most participants also worked and so a photo shoot was not an option. In resolving to ensure that the photographic images were acceptable and representative, I asked contributors to nominate any land or sea-scapes, along with other elements of community life, that were specific to their responses in interview. Wherever possible they then provided their approval of the photographs or asked for alternatives.

³⁷⁹ Foster, H. (1996), *The return of the real.*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., p. 180, cited in Roberts, B. (2008), op. cit.

8. Ethics: Probity and Transparency

The usual process of navigating ethical standards forms part of all primary research practice and I add to it the need for complete transparency with regard to researcher engagement with people in communities. The importance of this feature of the research lies with the need to engage honestly and openly, not only through a full disclosure of the research, but just as importantly, in responding to questions about issues of one's personal motivation, world view, values and so on. Whilst this may be construed as a challenge to the need for good boundaries, it is offset by the fact that there is always an unfolding flow between *the researcher and the researched*. To therefore ask a participant to speak honestly and openly about their personal views and then resile from a similar request flies in the face of reason and sets in place a clear differential between researcher and participant.

As an additional component of ethical practice participants had the opportunity to exclude any information that was recorded. As may be appreciated, when contributors engage freely and in an unguarded manner there are times when the range of information they provide extends to contentious issues.

Carolyn Ellis³⁸⁰ explores this aspect of qualitative research in relation to acts of disclosure. While her focus is on the relationship between researchers and intimate others, the cautionary inflexion of her work is, in my view, equally applicable to social research generally. For that reason, I did exclude sensitive information from both interview transcripts, along with the content of the digital artefact. In some cases people asked me to exclude specific comments or discussions. In others, I applied a general rule of thumb: to exclude anything that may have the potential to embarrass or compromise participants.

³⁸⁰ See: Ellis, C. (2008), "Do we need to know?", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 14, pp. 1314-1320; Ellis, C. (2007), "Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research with Intimate Others", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 13, pp. 3-29

Evaluation Framework

Because this research is formative a set of evaluation criteria was developed against which the research elements and methods could be assessed. The purpose here rests with the fact that some account needed to be taken of the degree to which the methodology and methods effectively supported the aims of the research. In addition, an opportunity arises to suggest any further adjustments that might support a refinement of the framework. Outlined below are the evaluation criteria. The results will be documented in the Research Outcomes section of the thesis.

Evaluation Framework: <i>Specify Community</i>		
Research Elements & Methods	Criterion met/ not met (Specify the degree to which the element was successfully met; include an account of any limiting features)	Proposed amendments or adjustments
1. Informal on-site engagement and relationship building		
2. Presence in community: Unobtrusive Observation		
3. Informal conversational interview		
4. Accurate Representation: Analysis and Evidence		
5. Themes		
6. Development of a digital artefact		
7. Ethics: Probity and Transparency		
Additional Considerations		

Review

The design and conceptual-methodological framework that was developed to support this research addressed the need to move beyond some of the more conventional approaches to social research. In particular, it asserted equivalence between human and natural environments, along with the ways in which both are represented. The development of a more authentic naming of the methodology also responded to this challenge; rather than stretching the limits of pre-existing approaches a decision was made to respond through innovation.

While the application of visual methods is not new to social research, the embedded nature of the digital artefact constitutes a move toward a more comprehensive representation of the people and places that supported the process. This not only contributes to the development of the thesis, just as importantly it delivers to contributors a set of artefacts that reflect and express their own place, presence and contributions to community sustainability.

The Evaluation of Research Elements and Methods responds to the fact that the communographic character of the work is formative. Given that there is no disciplinary antecedent to support it, an evaluation framework that addressed any deficits or challenges that accompanied its implementation was indicated. The results of the evaluation not only inform the Research Outcomes, they also support a more transparent and authentic account of the validity of the approach. This includes clear disclosures about the strengths, limits and challenges that inevitably arise when we attempt any innovation.

Chapter 6

The Communography

Before proceeding to the Communography a few words about the digital artefacts. In terms of the sequencing and content of both text and DVD, I have included two short, introductory sections for both Australia and Scotland that deal with the business of reaching the communities. Entitled: *Getting There*, each of the various locations in Scotland and Australia emerges at journey's end and is thus located in a broader spatial-environmental context. This approach situates various communities as part of, rather than separate from, the settings in which they arise. This is something that I consider relatively important, particularly because the connections and linkages between and beyond localities so often shape the character and fortunes of community life. In the case of island communities this is particularly relevant, though it also registers more generally in relation to proximity to services, workplaces, amenities and so on.

Following this, each contributor is introduced through a brief textual summary of the community context in which they live, along with a comprehensive record of interview. Subsequently, Researcher Commentary and Themes are developed for each interview.

Communities and Contributors

Australia

In Australia, all interviews were undertaken between 2010 and 2012 in St. Leonards, on Victoria's Bellarine Peninsula and Bamba, in the Otway Ranges.

St. Leonards and Bamba: Getting There

St. Leonards lies approximately 100 kilometres from Melbourne on Victoria's Bellarine Peninsula. Connected to major regional centres via a V-line (regional train) service the small coastal village is reached via South Geelong, after which a local bus transports commuters on a one-hour journey to the end of the line.

The trip from Melbourne to St. Leonards departs from Southern Cross Station, a major rail terminal in Victoria's capital city. A busy hub, the station sits at the intersection of a major CBD road and tram network. A gathering place not just for commuters, the area now hosts buskers, street vendors and a number of homeless people in search of whatever money or food they can draw from the passing crowds. Like many capital cities around the globe, the demographic cluster around the station reflects much of the prevailing social and economic circumstances of post-millennial democracies, where the busy commute for workers sits beside the extended street-stay of those for whom there is no work and no permanent shelter. Many busk for loose change while others adopt a more direct approach in solving the 'shortage' problem. Either way, the presence of people for whom certainty has long since passed provides a constant reminder of how life actually is ...everywhere.

Bamba lies in the lower reaches of the Otway Ranges in Victoria's southwest. Never achieving the status of 'town' Bamba endures as a locality that resonates with the history of sheep and cattle farming, agroforestry and a nascent attempt at coal mining early in the twentieth century. Characterised by a range of homespun initiatives there are the usual short-stay villas and eateries, along with a few hobby farms and more enduring attempts to re-green the landscape by farmers who participate in the 'trees on farms' program.

Contributors

In St. Leonards

Lionel S, long-term resident of St. Leonards and ‘keeper’ of the wetlands.

My initial meeting with Lionel was not part of a primary research process. On the contrary, our first encounter was merely a happy accident that brought us into each other’s company. In effect, we all but collided on a beach track in St. Leonards, and as often happens, struck up a conversation in the ordinary manner of people who are simply out for a stroll. Lionel was an easy walking companion who offered up many of his own insights and observations about the well-trod track we traversed. And just as we fell into step with each other during our long walk, so the conversation flowed easily between us.

The decision to include Lionel as a contributor played out over an extensive period of time, and while the unfolding story of that process forms part of the following account, he did not want his voice to be included in the digital artefact. He was happy to have me record our conversation, but for reasons of his own wanted to have his contribution documented in print. The inclusion of his contribution in the DVD is supported by my own voiced commentary, which constitutes an accurate account of what passed between us on our first and subsequent meetings. The accompanying photographs are a combination of Lionel’s nominated images and those that I took as we walked and talked.

Given these constraints, and in order to convey the depth and detail of our conversation, this entry is necessarily more extensive than those of other participants. *First Meeting* constitutes a short excerpt of our initial meeting that was introduced in the Prelude. In introducing the conversation that took place on May 30, 2010 I have summarised that excerpt in order set the scene and the tenor of the exchanges that followed. *Getting to the Point* captures the unfolding events that followed our initial meeting and *Later on* concludes the exchange.

First Meeting

On a balmy morning in May, 2010 I had got up early in the hope of catching some of the sounds that greet the day. My purpose was straightforward enough – I needed to develop competencies in sound recording and photography. The light on the Bay and the character of wetlands would provide the practice I was looking for, and so I got organized and set off. I chose the walk to Edward's Point because it is usually a long and solitary undertaking. It's rare to encounter anyone along the track and the prospect of an uninterrupted first run was something I looked forward to.

A couple of kilometres from my home signage announces the Edward's Point track. I'd not met anyone thus far and had taken a couple of short sound-bites to test the recorder; the same with the camera. Everything was going well enough to put the gear away and just amble along and enjoy the walk for a while. This was familiar country to me; the trek out to the Point was a path I walked regularly as an escape from the usual environments that I navigated – cities and larger regional centres that drew me away for work.

As I ambled in the general direction of the Point I passed a haggard old tea-tree. The species was introduced into Australia shortly after European settlement and now constitutes something of a cultural hallmark, especially in Victoria. A variety of myrtle, they twist and turn, contorting as they grow. Given the right conditions most will live for 60 or 70 years, after which time they are replaced by 'pioneering species' such as wattle. This was certainly the cycle at Edward's Point and the 'old girl' was clearly nearing the end of her time. Knotted as if by magic I wondered how long she'd last. I'd met her so many times before, yet was always astounded at the extreme range of her contortions. The loop she made at the mid-trunk was not something I'd encountered in a tea-tree anywhere else, so I was always a bit captivated by the feat.

Needless to say I was absorbed in my own reverie when Lionel burst forth from the surrounding scrub. Well concealed and quiet he emerged before I heard him. Catching me in the process of contemplating the old tree his quick rejoinder caught me well and truly off guard. Not only did few people

venture here, but to be met by someone who was so immediate in his engagement amplified my surprise.

Our meeting was underscored by Lionel's pronouncement that the old girl would last for another year or two. I wasn't so sure, but the exchange between us was as natural as the environment in which we found ourselves. Yes, we'd seen each other occasionally, a friendly nod to each other from a distance. More usually I had my dog, Stella, for company but Lionel always travelled solo. Introductions done, Lionel wanted to know where my dog was. The exchange then escalated. Extending his hand, he introduced himself; we traded names and moved on together.

In the hour or so that followed Lionel had drunk most of the water that I had with me and eaten a couple of apples. He'd been up early and hadn't expected to be walking as far as the Point. The only concern I had was the smell infusing the air between us – Lionel stunk of fish. Needless to say I kept my thoughts about his 'pong' to myself as the conversation turned to his investigation of the technologies that I had with me.

The following account of our journey is an accurate rendering of the conversation that got underway shortly after the consumption of water and apples - it started with Lionel's questioning...

Getting to the Point

"So, you taking some snaps?" he gestures to my backpack which contains the camera and hand-held voice recorder.

"Yeah...got some good ones...the old girl (tea-tree) up the track, some of the birds..."

Lionel probed for more information. "So, you a nature lover too?"

Before answering I thought about the real purpose of my walk that morning. I had gone out, technologically equipped, to take some stills and record some noises as a prelude to the project that was about to unfold. Would a stranger on a beach track want to know, or should I just go with the flow and the moment? Before I could decide Lionel intuited what was going on.

"I mean, I'm not being nosey or anything... Ha! Maybe I am, maybe I am, but the camera and that recorder thingy – whatchya up to?"

There seemed little point in avoidance, so as succinctly as I could I gave Lionel 'the drum'. I was practising, trying to skill up with the camera and the recorder. I was working on some research about the ways that people live in community; on how people see community; on what they value; the natural and built environments were part of it, and so was sustainability (whatever that meant). I wanted to talk to people who were working towards a more sustainable future and get them to show me what they valued about their communities – like the natural environment, animals, plants, people - anything. I wanted to photograph their images and I wanted to record their voices as they talked about what they valued and what their intentions were when they started out on the path to sustainability...

I paused and looked at Lionel. His gaze was intense, his head turned toward me. Suddenly he stopped walking.

"So, *why*? What made ya wanna do that?"

I was frank.

"Well, the thing is, I want to understand it. I want to know what drives people to try and get it together...you know, in communities, to try and improve how we meet each other, and the rest of it – the natural environment. How do we get some kind of balance, harmony, so that we don't keep

stuffing it up. You look around this place, it's beautiful, but I tell you, last walk I counted ten dead mutton birds, a couple of cormorants, and pelicans on the shoreline... and that's just for starters."

Lionel got it. With exuberance he challenged me.

"Come with us, up to the very end of the Point. Meet Ron!"

And he beamed a great smile at me for good measure. I'd surely want to meet Ron, wouldn't I?

(Who the hell was Ron, and what had I gotten myself into?)

"Ron? Who's Ron? He one of your mates?"

Lionel was cryptic and evasive, but no less encouraging.

"Ahhhhh... Wellll.... You'll just have to wait til we get there, won't ya?"

I debated the wisdom of my next move but made it anyway. I would mosey on along to meet 'Ron' – what the hec!

Before we moved off Lionel pointed to my backpack.

"You might want to get that tape recorder out, and yer camera...you're gonna need 'em when ya meet Ron...?" And he laughed.

We moved off in synch and walked a few paces before Lionel came to a dead halt. He turned and faced me.

"Say, why don't ya get out yer tape recorder and ya can practice on me! How'd that be? Ask me anything...no photos though! Alright?"

And so I did...

"So, Lionel, what brings you into the great outdoors?"

At which Lionel glared at me.

"Ya have to be serious. If you want me to talk to ya, you have to take it serious. Alright?"

Duly chastened I regroup.

"Lionel, you've lived in these parts for a while now I take it? What brought you here?"

Lionel exhales.

"Whell, I reckon it was the best option at the time, not that I'm sorry. Love it here now. Bit hard at first. Not too much of the 'ready'. But that's OK. Grew me own veg and put in a couple of fruit trees. That was twenty odd years

ago...yeah, anyway, I've always loved the salt. Came out of the merchant service – had bit of bad luck; crate fell on us...took a while to get better...anyway, I needed the salt and places were cheap down here... back then. Bought the little hut up on the Bluff, did it up a treat. Anyway, it's home, you know. Still in good nick...mind you, could do with a bit of a paint job now. Anyway, that's the story."

We pause but Lionel has hit his stride.

"Go on, ask me something else. Go on..."

Undaunted I pursue the now foetid-smelling Lionel.

"So Lionel, you said you'd been out here since five this morning - why so early?"

Lionel eases into the moment, relishing his own storytelling.

"Yeah, well, the thing is, I was after a few flatty scraps (flathead)."

He pauses and feigns an exaggerated sniffing motion.

"Peee-ew, they pong a bit, don't they?"

I nod as he rummages in the oversized pockets of his khakis and produces two flathead skeletons. Gesturing at the very dead flatties he continues.

"They're for Ron, ya see. Poor old buggar's had a rough time of it and anyway, he won't come up if I'm empty handed."

I can't resist.

"So, come on, who's Ron?"

Lionel is sharp, quick.

"Naaaaa, yer not getting me that easy. You'll just have to wait. Anyway, we're nearly there."

We turn the last bend and head to the Point.

A little further on and scores of water birds huddle onto the sand as the tide rolls in. Pelicans abound here, along with scores of cormorants.

Lionel stops, smiles broadly.

"Paradise! Whaddaya reckon?"

I share the sentiment and we stroll on together, gaining ground on the birds before us. Lionel starts to frown. Looking this way and that he's searching out someone, or something. I can't resist. "What's up? You expecting someone?"

Lionel stops dead in his tracks, perplexed. After a few seconds he exhales sharply and curses: "Old buggar, he'll never learn..."

He turns to me and the tale tells itself.

Ron, a male Pelican, recently recovered from a life-changing ordeal, has 'wandered off back to the slip' (yet again). The ill-fated bird earned his name (Ron) when local fishermen noticed that he didn't bolt the scraps that they regularly threw to the birds on their return from a day's fishing. Ron always hoarded and held the scraps for hours, eventually swallowing the contents of his huge beak. Amused by the bird's antics he earned the appellation 'Ron' – so ascribed because of his propensity to save the fish for 'later on' – abbreviated in the Australian vernacular as 'ron'.

According to the story, Lionel had observed these antics for many days and couldn't make it out. Eventually, his mounting curiosity led to a more studied approach of the bird's behaviour. Pelicans were renowned for bolting any spare fish thrown their way; Ron's behaviour 'just wasn't natural'.

One fateful afternoon Lionel watched as Ron languished, eventually dropping the contents of his beak (several fish carcasses). Now convinced that there was something very wrong with Ron, Lionel captured the pelican by throwing an old blanket over him. By all accounts the bird didn't put up much of a fight and Lionel dispatched him to a nearby Wildlife Rescue Service with great haste, convinced that he 'needed to be seen'. After some detailed questioning and negotiating on Lionel's part, they eventually agreed to take a look at Ron. "Ahhh, poor old thing. Turned out he had a tangled mess of fishing line stuck in his gullet. Gawd, no wonder he was havin' trouble with his tucker."

Lionel cast his gaze back to the sandy promontory. He looked worried so I pursued the story.

"So, Ron's supposed to be here? Is this where you brought him after his trip to the Rescue Service?"

"Yeah. Thought it might be a good idea to bring him out to his pals – keep him away from the boat ramp and all that tackle. Don't want a repeat of all

that. Old bugger always gets himself back there though...gonna have ta go and find him, make sure he's OK...that's what the flatty scraps were for."

The poignant tale drifted away as we turned together and made our way back to the boat ramp in search of Ron. Along the way we fell into easy conversation about the dredging of the Bay (Port Phillip Bay) and its impacts on the shoreline and the wildlife. I wanted to know how he felt about the erosion and the dead birds. I was curious about the fact that he cared so much for the wildlife and yet contained any emotion about the extent of mounting degradation to the environment.

"So, how do you feel about it – you live here and you can't miss it - it's changing fast. Half the shoreline's gone; and then there's the dead mutton-birds, and the cormorants and pelicans. They reckon they're starving to death, either that or they're poisoned by the heavy metals that come up after they dredge the channel; gets into the food chain."

Lionel's tone is contemplative, philosophical.

"Yeah, well, true enough. But I got me own way with it..."

"How do you mean?"

He gestures at the landscape: "All this – far as the eye can see – it's mine, see. All mine. Me own private little estate. Ha!"

Lionel is losing me so I chase after the detail. "Lionel, I like your style, but how is it *yours*, exactly?"

"It's mine because I can *see* it. *Belongs* to me..."

I'm at a loss, but only momentarily: "So, if you can see it, it's *yours*. That it?"

"Yeah, that's about the strength of it. See, if I can see *it* and *it* can see me then I own *it* and *it* owns me. Ya get it? Two-way thing..."

I was getting the message. Lionel expands as we walk.

If he owns things, then it means taking care of them - no matter what. It's all his, and mine too. It's everyone's. By his telling of it, he used to be a bit 'headstrong', but not so much these days. He takes it slow and easy and doesn't let too much 'ruffle the old feathers these days; people'll do what they'll do...'

For Lionel, the reality of change was inescapable, but his approach was to 'choose yer battles'. In short, there was no 'winning a battle with the

'moneygrabbers'. The 'fight' for environmental justice was best served by doing as much as one could in the immediate vicinity of home. As he put it: "People catch on; takes its time, but they catch on..."

We pick up the pace and I remain caught by the prospect of what we 'own' and Lionel's take on it. As we chat about it the conversation steps us back to the tea-tree covered track, traversed an hour or so earlier. As we retrace our steps and draw alongside the 'old girl' I stall, pressed by the impulse to look about.

Lionel waits and looks about trying to follow my gaze. "What's up?"

"Don't know...I just want to have a look about. Can you hang on a tick?"

Lionel obliges, watching me as I back up a few steps to look into the scrub.

"You see something?"

"Not yet."

Looking to the left of us I peer into the tea-tree canopy, something indiscernible had caught my peripheral vision.

If 'seeing is believing' then my struggle was with acceptance. What I saw confounded both sense and reason - but *see* it I did.

Lionel caught my surprise. Eager for an explanation he followed my gaze.

What I saw, he saw. We stood stock still, waiting. Waiting for movement, noise, flight - anything that would affirm that vision is a reliable faculty.

I looked to Lionel and found him searching my face for some confirmation of the vision before us.

I spoke first.

"I-don't-believe-it, I really don't!"

"Shhh. Keep it down; you'll frighten her."

I dropped my voice to a whisper. "But she's *white*. She's actually *white*."

Lionel was quicker to recover than I was. "Get ya camera, and be quick about it. She'll up and off any minute."

I was nervous and fumbled to set the focus. I held my breath and took two quick shots. She didn't move. Not an inch.

"She's watching us, hey? She hasn't moved...hey, d'you reckon she's sitting on eggs?"

Lionel contemplated momentarily. "Might be. I tell ya, I've never seen anything like it. *White*."

We both stood still and stopped our whispered incredulity; still no movement. Nothing. She must be on eggs. She'd have to be. Seized by the prospect of a better look I turned to Lionel.

"Hey, how about I get a bit closer...I'll go slow, I won't startle her...what do you think?"

Lionel thought it over – for a whole minute!

"Yeah, well, go slow, OK? Get your camera organized first; no fast moves. Try not to spook her, OK? I'll wait here...and hey, just watch the scrub, lots of old stumps – mind how you go..."

I set off gingerly into the scrub, as I got a few feet closer I set up a shot and zoomed in. What came into view challenged every canon of 'vision'. I hurled myself toward my target. As I did Lionel yelled at me, full force:

"Bloody well slow down! Ya-*mad*-buggar, what the bloody hell d'ya think yer doin'!"

I laughed and goaded Lionel. "Ha! Come on in, *she's* not going anywhere...well, not as long as her *tree's* still standing..."

Lionel, clearly disgruntled, made a tentative attempt to follow but thought better of it. "I'll wait here, if it's all the same to you."

I forged ahead, deep into the undergrowth, taking several shots as I went.

I looked back to where Lionel fidgeted nervously, peering at me, waiting for me to stop harassing the bird. I yelled back to him.

"Hey, get over here – you won't believe this!"

Lionel was wary, but impelled by curiosity picked his way through the scrub. Eyes down, watching out for stumps and other hazards, he drew alongside without once having looked up. When he did, he gaped and sputtered.

"Blimey...never seen anything like it in me *life*...could'a *sworn*...jeez."

Lionel's recovery was swift as he turned sharply to face me.

"Go on, you gotta *name it*. Go on. Whatchya gonna call it?"

My turn to be perplexed (and slow).

"*Name it*? What on earth are you on about?"

Lionel grinned. "You found it, you name it. Get it? It's yours now; have ta name it...that's how it works...you're a *discoverer*. Ha! Whaddya reckon about *that!*?"

Given our earlier conversation about the nature of ownership, about *seeing*, I had little choice. Had I attempted to resile from the exhortation to name my 'discovery' I'd have met with a vehement telling-off, of that I was sure.

I stopped to contemplate. How would one – indeed, how *should* one – name a tree that carries within it the perfect form of a *bird*?

"Got it! Hey, what about *birdwood*? How's that!"

Lionel laughed and patted me on the back.

"That's it...you got it...yours now. You'll have ta come back and check it from time to time, ya know that, don't ya? That's the way it works."

We played back the stills of 'birdwood' before moving off and Lionel demanded that he be allowed to choose one. When he'd decided on his preferred image I promised to have it developed and mounted for him, as a gesture of thanks for the company and the conversation.

We strode off, invigorated.

On the beach-track into town we passed a 'gathering' of Pelicans and Lionel stopped to check the company assembled for Ron. Nowhere to be seen so we pushed on to the jetty...

Finally, perched precariously on the pier near the place of his near demise was the resplendent 'Ron' himself. I had expected an old, scruffy bird, but was met instead by a healthy looking, if smallish specimen. Lionel was, by turns overjoyed and annoyed, declaring that the bird would be the 'death of him'. Eventually, the skeletal remains of the two flatties were proffered to Ron, whose social graces left a lot to be desired.

With the errant bird now found, Lionel and I said our goodbyes, agreeing to catch up when I had developed the chosen photographs.

Later on...

It would be fair to say that Lionel and I were each curious about the other's mission on the day of our first meeting. For my part, his fishy smell provoked curiosity. For him, I had 'things' in my backpack that hinted at some purpose other than a mere walk. The open exchange between us clarified our distinct preoccupations, yet it extended to something that went further and deeper.

Lionel, after hearing about my project and the need to skill up, was generous and encouraging as he offered to be a 'guinea pig' for me to practice my voice recording. He was a good interviewee and took the whole thing seriously. For my part, I was having a nice time chatting with this older gent who knew a lot about the wetlands. He was a strange-cut diamond who clearly cared deeply for the life about him. There was also an ease and a grace about him – he didn't get angry about the forces at work that left their impacts on our much loved salt marsh. As for me, I was given pause to reflect on my own vehement distaste for the downside of progress. As he put it: "No point in getting ticked off – just gotta do what you can..."

Our conversations over the next few weeks extended well into the substance of the research. At this time I was still intending to focus on the Transition Towns Movement and Lionel was engaged and interested, wanting to know all about it. In particular he wanted to know whether they were aiming to 'spread themselves around and take over the world!' He wanted to know about their success – were they as good as they sounded? As for my intention to include Iona – a small island off the west coast of Scotland that no-one had ever heard of – well, this, he thought, was just plain funny! As he put it: "Hey, couldn't get much further away, could ya!" By his sardonic reasoning he figured that I just wanted a holiday and this was about as good a way to get it as he could think of! We both laughed and I acknowledged that it would be an adventure, that was for sure, but I went back to my original interest and reasons for choosing Iona – it was unfamiliar and it would pick up some of the issues about spirituality and the way in which it framed other ways of living in the world. The same was true of Transition Towns – they were just as unfamiliar and this counted for something in terms of the research. It would mean that I'd avoid personal bias; I'd be open to what I was meeting

and I wouldn't be carrying any assumptions with me. It was important, especially to the process of finding out what motivated people; what values they took with them – all of that.

As I explained the reasoning behind my choice of research sites he looked at me sceptically. He didn't interrupt, but his quizzical countenance persisted. After a time I paused and asked him what he thought about it all.

His response was laconic: "What about just those ordinary places – you know, where most of us live...I mean, isn't that how most of the world is? How come ya don't want to know about that too?"

I was stumped but soldiered on. My own view was that St. Leonards was my own hometown. I couldn't very well be doing this sort of research in my own backyard. I was too close to it; I couldn't be absolutely sure that there'd be no researcher bias.

At this Lionel chuckled and I was a bit taken aback. Not sure how to react I waited until finally, he explained.

"Gawd, I mean, look, what's the difference between 'them over there' and 'us', here? Ya get what I mean? Like, we're all the *same*. I mean, I *can* see why ya want to go off to Scotland to that island– yeah, I can – like, its different and its been going a while. But, what's wrong with us here? We matter, don't we? And anyway, if you really wanna do some good, why don't ya find out about the way *most of us live*?"

My lame response: I'd *think* about it...

Over the next couple of weeks our conversation replayed itself in those quiet moments that we open up when we do stop to reflect. Added to that was another series of shifts that fuelled my now growing uncertainty about the approach I'd adopted. The Transition Town that I had engaged included people with whom I'd forged some solid relationships. I'd been invited to some of the working bees and had got to know many of them quite well. They had also been amenable to participating in the project. Yet, as is often the fate of unfolding movements, they were coming up against a level of what I considered ill-conceived critique. Some of their detractors had tagged them middle class 'greenies' who were privileged enough to have the time and resources to support an alternative 'lifestyle'. Still others looked to some of

the challenges they faced as they expanded too quickly, without the prerequisite strategies in place to deal with a broader urban context. Whether these critical observations held merit or not, the fact remained that the people with whom I had been engaged became a little hesitant about being 'researched'. Not unreasonably, they had some concerns about the potential for 'negative press' that could flow from research, especially because it would come at a time when they were recruiting new members and finding their feet.

And so, the convergence of these two developments led to a significant re-think. On the one hand, Lionel's gentle challenge had its own merit. It implied a need to look to the ground we all occupy – the most ordinary and unstructured elements of day-to-day life. On the other, challenges facing the Transition Town members had created some stresses and needed to be factored into their need to feel secure in what they were doing. Even though I would not be attempting to dislodge or diminish their considerable gains through 'critique', it was a fair call on their part to retreat a little from being researched.

Not long after our initial meeting and long walk, Lionel and I re-met at the beach. I had Stella, my dog, with me and she was glad of the new company. As she retrieved countless sticks from the sea Lionel asked me how it was all going. I confessed that his challenge had had an impact; apart from that there were some issues with the Transition Town people. So now I was reconsidering my approach. He smiled wryly and observed that things sort themselves out if we're smart enough to see what's actually going on.

I chuckled and retorted. "Pretty damned smart, aren't ya!"

He beamed a broad grin and observed that maybe he was "smart enough to be a *pro-fessor*..."

I laughed and told him that I thought he already was a Prof - he just taught in the University of the Wetlands and wasn't getting paid!

We eased into conversation and I told him that I'd taken what he'd had to say on board. I thought I could actually do what he prescribed, and in fact, his point about the collective ordinary, as opposed to the well organized and

specific, had some merit. I still wanted to go to Iona, largely because of the fact that this intentional community had sustained itself since the late 1930's, and that was a feat in itself. It would also provide a good opportunity to look at things that are very much ignored in the search for sustainability. As for the Transition Town, well, I'd be able to let that go in favour of my own community.

Lionel seemed pleased about the shift but wasn't anticipating what followed. I turned to him and the following short conversation took place.

"So, thanks, I owe you one!"

"Whell, I'll be blowed. (Laughing) So, this means I get a raise, right!"

Laughter.

"Yeah, well, my people'll have to speak with your people about that - budget's tight right now...cutbacks, you know...but hey, what about the shot of Ron, and that one of Birdwood...and I'll give you a DVD when it's finished - you'll get to see Iona."

"Beaut! I'll settle for that."

"Oh, there's just one thing I forgot..."

"Yeah, what?"

It was at this point that I put my request to Lionel to allow me to use the 'practice' recording that I had done on that day of our first meeting. The content was very good, particularly because the conversation between us had flowed so easily. Apart from that, Lionel had articulated some of the more profound considerations about human relationships with broader environments and species. It struck me as a great starting place, especially because of my decision to shift the focus of the research to St. Leonards.

During the next hour or so we navigated his initial reluctance. Not wanting to push it, I reiterated the value of what he'd had to say, but accepted that maybe he wasn't all that keen to be included. After all, a chance meeting on a bush track is precisely that and in the ordinary course of events no-one would expect such a meeting to become a substantive part of a research project.

I asked Lionel to just give it a bit of thought and maybe get back to me with answer. I made it clear to him that I'd respect his decision.

A week later Lionel got in touch. He was clearly shy and a little self-conscious about being part of something that would include other people who lived well beyond the routine of his own life. His humility was very much a part of him, and yet, as he put it: “Maybe we all need to meet each other, hey?”

And then: “Yeah, alright, I’m in...but!...now, yer *not* to use me voice, you know, like when ya recorded me - that was just a *practice*...’n’ anyway, I don’t always speak right. Know what I mean? You write what I said, OK?...’part from anything else, people believe what they see in print and who wants ta listen to an old todger like me goin’ on about owning the world!”

And so we negotiated a way through his shyness. When it came down to it, Lionel was pleased about being part of something that he thought had merit – especially the fact that it would now include the most ordinary aspects of community life. He generously gave his permission for this account and commentary to be printed and shared. By arrangement, I followed up with him in a more specific way about the central questions that I’d be putting to the other contributors who would follow him. A summary of his responses is outlined below.

What does sustainability mean from your point of view?

For Lionel, sustainability was a ‘new word’, one that was not part of his personal vocabulary, history or the locality that he lived in. As he put it:

“I know what they mean and all, but it’s not an ordinary way to talk about things. It’s like we’ve got roped into a whole new thing that lots of people just don’t understand. I mean, if a thing’s ta last then we’re gonna need ta know where it fits with everything else. So I suppose, just fer me, sustainability of *anything* won’t happen unless everything it needs to survive gets a go too. Like, people. See, we worry about ourselves but we *just-don’t-get it*; if the sun don’t shine and the rain don’t fall, we’ve had it. Then there’s the rest – birds and insects and the ground and all. We stuff it up and we’re history...everything *needs* everything else. Yeah, so, fer me, sustainability means, first off, understanding how everything works together, and then setting ourselves up to make sure we work with it all – you know, like don’t just use everything up an’ walk away. Put back, put back stuff that’ll help things ta grow and *last*. It’s about respect too – respect fer all the critters and

what *they need* to eat and make a home. We're a mad lot, hey? We don't get it...never used to be like this – not this bad anyway..."

What sustains you personally?

"Me? Ha, that's easy, that is. You've seen it. Me little estate! Eddies Point, those wetlands...everything that's there. I mean, there's lots of places like that, but, thing is, it's *special*. Ya can't take anything out if it or it'd be wrecked. So it's an all-together-thing – the whole place and everything in it. That make any sense to ya? Yeah, well, keeps me goin and it damn well makes me smile – even ole Ron! I can live without lotsa things, but not that..."

Commentary

Early in 2013, after many walks together and a couple of book exchanges, two events reordered the small universe that Lionel and I had occupied. The first was to take Lionel away on a mission to the New South Wales coast. His only sibling, an ageing sister, was 'close to her time' and with no other family to step into the breach Lionel went to care for her in her last days. She 'wanted to go at home, not in some hospital...' and so he stepped up, telling me that he'd be back, but 'not to wait up...and keep an eye on things.'

I'd missed seeing him about, and more still I missed our impromptu chats and mutual stirring.

By October 2013, Lionel had been absent for many months and having promised to keep an eye on things I decided to take a walk down to the old-girl and to birdwood. It was a great day - sunny, no wind. Everything was as it usually was. As I turned the slow bend that opens up to reveal the old tea-tree I scanned the track, but she was nowhere to be seen. I looked again, figuring that it had been so long since I'd been down there that I'd probably lost my bearings. I sped up and drew level with a sight that I initially refused to accept: there she was, lying prostrate - she'd collapsed at the side of the track, her life done.

I stood there for a while, paid my respects, and took a shot of her - for posterity, and for Lionel.

Themes

Connection to Place

For Lionel, the consistency with which place registered was manifest in constant references to local topography, landmarks, species and the nature of the local community of people. As will no doubt be obvious from the record of interview, a strong personal engagement with all elements of the local landscape rested on a level of personal knowledge about it. Manifest in a protective disposition, this fed into what presented as a constant valuing of the environment.

Environmental Cohesion

Constantly articulated was the need for the balance of things to remain undisturbed. This was consistently evidenced in an eco-systemic engagement, where the coherence and connection between various elements of the local lifeworld were seen to be paramount.

Continuity

Less obvious was the continuity in all of Lionel's dealings with his home. His walks and 'inspection's' happened on an almost daily basis.

Striking a Balance - Give and Take

In keeping with a coherent understanding of local ecology, the idea of stabilising what exists by not removing what is necessary was a consistent feature of interview.

Tina Grimes, founder of the St. Leonard's Food Swap

When I met Tina in 2012 she had been a permanent resident of St. Leonards for about three years and was in the process of establishing a local food swap. The local growing and sharing of food was something that could always strengthen the bonds within communities, but in a more general sense it was about food security, something that Tina had been involved in through her professional community development work.

In keeping with her own values, she had for some years been interested in a range of swaps – food, clothing and anything else that lent itself to a money-free exchange. For the people of St. Leonards this held a lot of appeal, particularly because the community is small and off the beaten track. It also ranks lower on the income scale than many of its neighbours and has a high concentration of people over 60, as well as a significant proportion of single-parent families.

After a longish lead-time, the St. Leonards Food Swap finally became an established, regular event that now draws contributions and exchanges from a broad range of local household growers. Held on the last Saturday of each month the venue is the local Progress Hall. Built in the 1920's the building is in need of repair and a homespun fund-raising initiative brought local makers and growers together as a way of raising the necessary cash to complete its refurbishment. The relatively small hall opens up to about 6 or 7 stall holders who sell locally produced goods that range from pottery and lace, to kids toys and hand made quilts. As for the food swap – it boasts a constant supply of seasonal vegetables, fresh eggs and herbs, along with homemade preserves, chutneys and jams. The first hour of the Swap is open to contributors, who simply exchange on a give-and-take basis. Thereafter anyone else is welcome to take whatever remains for a small donation – usually loose change or a gold coin. Whatever money is raised is reinvested in the Swap and pays for any advertising brochures or other material that is needed to keep the wheels turning. A modest amount goes to support the Hall refurbishment project.

As with many of the contributors, Tina's personal history is woven into the places that have been home throughout her life. In 1991 she migrated from

the UK to live permanently in Australia. Over the course of the next few years she was a regular visitor to St. Leonards and in 2000 bought a modest block of land with the hope of one day building an ecologically sound home. The land sits on the edge of wetlands and abounds with bird life. The vast open spaces and native flora resonate with memories of her previous home in Oulton Broad in Suffolk, on England's southeast coast.

In 2003 Tina realised her dream and commenced the build of a straw bale home on the block. Completed in 2007, its aesthetic appeal matches an energy efficient design that is open, light filled and earthy, the more so because of the vegie gardens and other flora. Now well established in her new home Tina contributes to the broader community in a range of ways. Most recently, she organized a Christmas tree-scape with a small group of avid knitters. The group decided to inject a bit of seasonal cheer into the small town by knitting a colourful array of decorations that adorned the trees that line the main street of St. Leonards.

For Tina, the idea of place and space encapsulates the natural as well as the human-constructed. The grand space that opens over the wetlands reveals a vista that is 90% sky and 10% land and this infuses life with a sense of peace. With bird species migrating through the wetlands from as far afield as Siberia, the place has a constant sense of movement. As she puts it: "It signifies journeys, not just of birds, but of people as well..."

What does sustainability from your point of view?

In our conversation about sustainability Tina acknowledged that the more usual way of rendering both word and concept revolved around economic, social and environmental issues. Whilst this is valid from her point of view, she made the point that 'sustainability' so often gets 'co-opted' by various interests and exploited for their own ends. For her, the linkages between social, economic and environmental factors were important elements of sustaining the world, but in a more grounded commentary she noted that "...sustainability is about giving back to a community...it's working towards a sense of wellbeing within that community...and contributing to that, rather than taking away so that it's depleted.

What sustains you personally?

“First and foremost it’s the wetlands area...that’s something that is a part of my wellbeing. Other things that are nourishing to me are the friends and neighbours that I have in the area...”

By way of example, Tina spoke about her involvement in a local football-tipping competition that operates in the streets close to her home. For her, a keen interest in Australian Rules Football is not the primary driver. Rather, it is the opportunity that the gathering provides that becomes central to what sustains her. Good relationships with friends and neighbours; doing things for each other. As she put it: “It’s the opportunity for people to come together and share...and that, for me, is incredibly sustaining. So the place and the people, they’re what sustain me here...so it’s social...and it’s the environment...and it’s the interplay between those things that sustain me here.”

Finally, Tina noted that the straw bale house that she built constituted a ‘personal footprint’ in the area – one that resulted in the ‘sanctuary’ that is now her home. Built from waste material that was recycled, the home has a special resonance because it embodies the values that steer her through life.

Commentary

As with most of the contributors to this project, I encountered Tina through the ordinary processes that unfold as we move through the day. I had seen a small advertisement in the local shop window about a prospective food swap in St. Leonards and got in touch with Tina to find out more. At the time I was simply an interested bystander. I grew some of my own veg. and thought the swap was a great idea. I’d lived in St. Leonards long enough to appreciate that there were pockets of hardship and poverty. A food swap would be a great addition to the small town.

Over time I got to know Tina quite well and got involved in the Swap on a regular basis. Eventually, I decided to ask Tina to participate in the project because I saw some merit in the practical expression of community sustainability that she had fostered. Modest though it was at its inception, the Food Swap grew at a slow and steady rate and had some spin-off benefits that

arose naturally. In particular, it drew people together on a regular basis over the issue of food production. During the early months there were lots of conversations about the 'how to' of growing various crops - about feeding the soil, rotating crops, and generally getting help when it was needed.

As word spread a range of younger families would come in to have a bit of a look, ultimately getting engaged by the fact that they could also grow some of their own veg. at home. For some this was a new adventure, mainly because they were accustomed to shopping for their food. This led to new friendships springing up as they sought advice, or even a friendly visit from someone able to steer them in the right direction as they prepared their garden beds.

Ordinary initiatives of this type often carry benefits that flow naturally when things fit their context. This has certainly been the case with not only the food swap, but also the refurbishment and renovation of the Progress Hall. Through the stall-holder fees and a few small fundraisers (sausage sizzles and the like) the building is now being restored to its former (modest) glory. The market and food swap are established fixtures and most of the township now patronises and contributes to both.

Themes

Recycling

For Tina, recycling and not wasting resources was a critical driver in setting up the food swap. Already engaged well beyond this local venture, she had been involved in a range of swapping enterprises, both in Australia and elsewhere. This extended to her straw bale home, much of which was built from recycled materials.

Food Security

Well informed about the general issue of food production and security, Tina had some recent involvement with local food production and swapping in the course of her professional work. This translated well into the St. Leonards initiative and she was well able to transfer her skills.

(Human) Relationship Building

Significant in much of her work and life was the issue of relationship building within the community. She joined and participated in a host of local activities and saw the connections between people as a fundamental precursor to further engagements with the sustainability of the local environment.

Connection to Place

Place and Space figured prominently for Tina. In St. Leonards she found an environment that resonated with her former home in the UK that enabled her to settle into the local landscape easily.

Lynn Leslie, founder of the 'Chook Hotel'

Lynn is a permanent resident of the St. Leonards community who settled into village life about five years ago. Her personal history had been bound to subsistence agriculture and conservation. In addition, she had always held strong views about the treatment of animals in the process of food production.

In the course of her first couple of years in St. Leonards Lynn established an easy rapport with the neighbours in her street. With many growing their own food Lynn mobilised and set up an informal process of crop rotation, which extended the variety of fruit and vegetables through planned cultivation. While production flourished, the local protein source had thus far been restricted to the few fish that would be sporadically caught from the pier. Returning to her interest in animal welfare, especially in relation to food production, Lynn decided to explore the idea of some free-range chooks as a source of eggs. She spoke with neighbours, who were keen to support the idea in practical ways. Within a few weeks she had sourced a factory-farm that sold off its laying hens after a year; considering their productive capacity less than optimal, the enterprise turned over their stock for a \$1.00 a bird.

In preparation for the new arrivals Lynn and company built a cosy hen-house and then proceeded to the factory farm to purchase their chooks. Young grandsons and friends in tow, 13 laying hens were purchased and let loose in the backyard. The process went smoothly enough at the purchase end, but landing in St. Leonards proved more challenging. The hens, having been restricted in their movement for all of their productive short lives, stumbled, sat and generally took some time to find their feet. As the days passed, twin grandsons Harry and Oliver – then 10 years old – struggled with the idea that the poor birds didn't know how to walk. They had already had the consequences of factory farming explained to them, but the reality was significantly different when they came face to face with the immobilised birds. Keen to make the animals welcome they decided to name them. Each in his turn chose unique and 'special' names, just 'so they'd know we loved them...' By the end of day-three all walked, clucked and generally made

enough noise to satisfy their young hosts that they were OK. 'Spaghetti' and 'Lizzie' were quick to lay and enjoyed being fed and watered as never before.

Over time egg production was so consistent that six sets of neighbours each regularly acquired a dozen eggs every couple of weeks. However, what also accompanied the free ranging production was the slow deterioration of the backyard. A solution had to be found. Within a week, the idea of 'Chook Spa' and 'Chook Retreat' took hold and the hens were dispersed across three sites, subsequently being rotated so they all got a 'turn' in the various environments that supported them.

What does sustainability mean from your point of view?

"...my connection with the environment...to feel part of the environment...not an intrusion, but a balanced part of it...the environment is all things – the plant life, the water, bird life, all the animals and creatures."

Of equal importance was a felt connection between people in the local community, and between people and their environment. Running counter to this was inappropriate development, especially where no regard for the broader environment registered.

What sustains you personally?

The sea was a predominant feature of personal connection to place, along with the contention that we are sustained by the beauty of our environment, as much as its more rational value.

Commentary

Lynn's connections with her local community carried two elements that hold equivalent value. The first centres on the natural-physical environment and the need to treat it with respect. Her local knowledge of the sea, as well as the flora and fauna was extensive and she talked at some length about the nature of fast-tracked development that paid little heed to these imperatives. This created 'great despair', especially when the earth is used as an endless resource. As she observed, if people were more connected on a deeper level to their environment then perhaps there would be less destruction.

In so far as human relationships are concerned, she has been involved in a range of modest, ongoing initiatives that support neighbourliness and co-operation. From establishing the Chook Hotel, to regular involvement in the local food swap, Lynn engages easily, not only with neighbours, but also with a broad range of local residents that she has got to know through both ventures.

Themes

Connection to Place

Not unlike Lionel, Lynn's attachment to and knowledge of place was a key theme that emerged throughout interview. A keen swimmer, she encouraged anyone game enough to participate in local pier-leaping activities and use the opportunity to highlight some of the less well known features of the local seascape – in particular, an old resident sting ray that frequented the waters around the pier. For, Lynn the beauty of place registered strongly and reflected the value attributed it.

Environmental Cohesion

Being an incorporate part of an environment was a prominent theme. With no sense of separateness, this feature of Lynn's interview resonated with her distress over the degradation that often accompanied development.

Human Relationship Building and Community Engagement

As with Tina, Lynn consistently registered the need to build strong communal bonds, especially because of the degree to which it facilitated co-operation and productive joint ventures.

Maria Menheere, Community Facilitator of the Men's Cooking Group and active supporter of the St. Leonards Men's Shed initiative

Maria lives in the neighbouring town of Clifton Springs, about 10 kilometres from St. Leonards. Having a long association with many of the smaller communities on the Bellarine Peninsula, it was a natural fit for the generous spirited Maria to become involved with a group of older male residents whose ordinary human needs for connection and friendship needed a helping hand. As facilitator of the Men's Kitchen, Maria donated her time to what she thought would be a simple enough initiative: to teach a group of older men how to cook. Enlisted by a long-time friend who co-ordinated a nearby Neighbourhood Centre, Maria set up the process by recruiting interested men in St. Leonards and the neighbouring village of Indented Head, three kilometres away. As it happened, the men who initially took up the offer were also part of a protracted process to get a Men's Shed going in St. Leonards. The Men's Shed Program is a national initiative in Australia. It is a funded program that enables community groups to construct purpose-built, modest sheds that provide local men with a place to meet and develop a range of woodwork and related skills. Its secondary function is to address the issue of social isolation that so often afflicts older men. In providing them with the opportunity to build friendship networks their integration into the life of local communities is much enhanced.

In operation for a decade the national program has enjoyed wide-ranging success in two ways. Firstly, the challenges that come with retirement from the workforce, or simply being unemployed and at a loose end, support the idea that peers are the best medicine when individuals struggle with health and other personal challenges. Rather than being diverted into support services that are usually remote from the communities of people who need them, this program addresses human need in a very human way. Secondly, the Men's Shed program often enables participants to construct a range of artefacts that are of direct benefit to people in their communities. This includes everything from kid's toys to furniture and related items. Sometimes things are simply restored or repaired and then recycled, finding new homes and providing a small amount of cash to those often struggling financially. Many of the local craft and produce markets across Australia provide a good

outlet for these sorts of activities. Whilst the range and size of Men's Sheds varies a little from place to place, most are modest – not much bigger than a household garage. All are equipped with tools and necessary machinery – lathes, drills, saws and so on – and all are located on community sites that are familiar.

When Maria became involved with the men who had been lobbying for their own shed it was as a cook, not a community development worker. She had always done considerable voluntary work in her own community and one of the reasons that drove the request for her to set up a Men's Kitchen centres on the fact that it would provide the men with an opportunity to socialise with each other while they waited for their shed to materialise. In effect, the cooking classes would support a process that could transfer easily over to the Shed (whenever that might be).

Expressions of interest were called and the response was good. Within a short period of time Maria had no less than a dozen neophyte chefs who knew little about cooking but were engaged by the idea. Apart from that, the premises on which the cooking classes would take place was a Local Council facility that would ultimately host the Men's Shed as well.

Over the course of the following two years or so Maria and her 'boys' met on Tuesdays, from 9am until about 1.30 pm, and slowly worked up a good repertoire of home-cooking. From simple deserts to cakes, biscuits and slices, the men graduated to main courses and then onto 'the fancy stuff'. The culmination in this process at the end of their first year was a Christmas bash to which their wives and partners were invited – a process repeated every year thereafter with increasingly delicious offerings.

As our conversation broadened, Maria and I discussed her own views about community life on the Northern Bellarine Peninsula. Because she had been a resident of the area for over twenty years she had seen considerable change, not all of it pleasing from her point of view. The affordability of housing, coupled with the growing demands of work meant that people had generally retreated from the neighbourliness that had characterised her formative years

in Barwon Heads, a locality on the other side of the Peninsula. She recalled the closeness of people to each other, along with the help and support that they provided.

What does sustainability mean from your point of view?

Being involved with other people was a central feature of community sustainability for Maria. This took many forms - community events, local groups and activities. Above all, it implied ongoing connections and relationship building as essential to good community functioning.

What sustains you personally?

The familiar landscapes of Barwon Heads, her childhood home-town, and the You Yangs, a designated reserve of rolling hills that can be viewed from her current home in Clifton Springs. Also high on the list of personally sustaining features of local life was the beach.

Commentary

Maria's relationship with 'the boys' is grounded in a very genuine concern for their welfare and wellbeing. Always supportive of their quest for the Shed she has remained a consistently strong advocate, especially at times when Local Government had to be navigated. On the face of it, her contribution to the eventual materialisation of the Shed seems relatively minor. Yet that said, Maria was, perhaps, the one person who was willing and able to invest time and energy in what was a dispiriting process. Along the way some of the initial supporters of the Men's Shed passed away; some fell ill; others moved out of town. Always buoyant and very much trusted, she was able to focus on persistence and hope in the long haul to actually get the shed built. My own view is that these qualities and traits of character were a vital force in ensuring the eventual success of the process.

My own involvement with Maria and 'the boys' came at the end of their first year together. They were all thoroughly enjoying their weekly cook-fest and lunches, but the hoped-for Shed still seemed a distant dream. Things had stalled for years through local and state government red tape and I was asked if I might lend a hand. The short-end of the long story was that I took on some

of this process and met regularly with the men in order to sort out a way forward. Throughout the following year we lobbied, met with councillors and staff, wrote mandatory letters and finally secured approval for the shed to go ahead. By arrangement with the men, my role faded as they took responsibility for their part in the process by nominating their own representatives on the building committee.

In 2013, ten years after its inception, the St. Leonard's Men's Shed was open for business. For three of those years, Maria was the 'rock' that kept the men engaged with each other and their collective dream. She listened to their raw humour, their life challenges, their health concerns and personal struggles and emerged from it all as "one of the boys" – a trusted fellow traveller who is actually allowed to enter the hallowed halls of 'men's land' – the Shed. The cooking group continues, and the Shed is now a flourishing enterprise in which the growing membership invests its considerable energy. Along the way, two octogenarians (Steve and Ken) supported the local primary school by teaching basic woodwork skills. In a town where kids enjoy very little community and social support, the woodwork classes provided pathways for kids who were often struggling with behavioural and social problems. Steve, an ex-primary school principal, and Ken, a grandfatherly figure, managed to bring something rare to the local community, for while both are skilled woodworkers, their more human contribution to young people remains priceless.

In many respects it would have been more usual to interview some of the men who were involved in the long, drawn-out saga to get the Shed off the ground. Apart from anything else, their collective involvement in both the cooking classes and the Shed development constitute a rich experience of community life. In so far as sustainability is concerned, this is particularly so because it lifts out some of the human challenges that confront local communities. Yet the relevance of these potential contributions to the research notwithstanding, it was Maria that I turned to in order to capture 'the story' of both.

Two underlying features of the overall process informed that choice. Firstly, the men trusted Maria to speak about the processes in which they had been involved. That is to say, they trusted her to speak about them and about their dream of the Shed. From their point of view, she reflected their quirks and qualities with equanimity and honesty. Secondly, the nature of the group was such that the tensions between individuals occasionally surfaced over the issue of representation. That is, the occasional bit of rivalry was often present where people had to decide who would be best able to represent them collectively. This was certainly the case when two representatives had to be elected to sit on the Shed building committee, run by council.

Clearly, social researchers often run the risk of aggravating well-established dynamics such as the one I encountered with this group of men. While their friendships enjoy continuity, so too do the hierarchies that develop around age, competencies and so on. In some respects this is the legacy of generational values: most of the men are in the age range from 65-85 years and 'respect' is accorded on that basis. That said, there are competing points of view about both process and progress with the Shed; left to their own devices, things settle organically enough and everyone moves forward.

Given the trust the men placed in her, coupled with my own observations over a considerable period of time, I chose to engage more directly with Maria. On a more personal note, I visited the cooking group regularly, not merely as part of the research process. I got to know the men well and was always invited to their various functions – Christmas breakup included. My own take on Maria's contribution is that it is effectively a very grounded representation of the dynamics at work in many smaller communities. More to the point, the subtleties at work in some community relationships so often enhance those relationships. When we approach particular activities and initiatives in a discrete manner that isolates them from their context we run the risk of actually skimming the surface. In the process, the notion of actually sustaining community life remains limited to the more obvious forces at work.

My purpose in raising these issues is to highlight the fact that the subtleties at work in small communities are often overlooked, especially in so far as human relationships are concerned.

Themes

Human Relationship-building

One of the most prominent features of Maria's engagement with sustainability was the process and meaning attributed to human relationships. A cornerstone of community life, the practice of mutual support and co-operation were seen as fundamentally important. This registered consistently throughout interview as she spoke about the various community based initiatives that she had been involved in over a long period of time.

Inappropriate (housing) development

In discussing the local communities that bound the northern Bellarine Peninsula Maria highlighted the ongoing encroachment of new housing estates that altered the general character of towns and villages. In acknowledging that "...people have to live somewhere..." she reflected on the transformations she had seen over a period of twenty years or so.

Manifest in a loss of neighbourliness and close bonds, the new estates represented significant change. In addition, the high cost of housing meant that people were more preoccupied with paying hefty mortgages than was the case during Maria's formative years.

At Bambra

Kester Baines established a native hardwood stand in Bambra over 20 years ago.

Part of an enduring dream, Kester and partner Suzanne let their search for suitable land on which to establish a native hardwood plantation take them back to a place that resonated with deep meaning. Kester's family had had a long association with the area. As is the case with most dreams and visions the business of making it happen took time. Money had to be saved and the right piece of land had to be found. In 1989, when vision and resources converged a fifteen-acre plot in the small hamlet of Bambra in Victoria's Otway Ranges, took form. Now the maturing forest of 150 Southern Mahogany, interspersed with Black Wattle, also hosts smaller plantations of Sugar Gum and Spotted Gum. With its own small dam, the property draws back native birds and flora, as well as a proliferation of bees and other insects.

Walking and talking our way through the native mahogany, Kester and I were accompanied by 'Bouncer', his diminutive canine companion. Glad of the open space and freedom to wander at large, Bouncer smiled a lot and kept pace with our meanderings, which led us past the rustic gravestones of Kester's previous 'companions'. The last resting place of no less than half a dozen old dogs, the land rolls into a broader plain beyond its boundaries, dotted with pasture, native flora and fauna and the occasional house.

For Kester, Bambra is part of his life, as opposed to a financial investment. As he notes, any benefit from the enterprise will take the form of a contribution to the integrity of the ecosystem and the broader natural environment: birds and other fauna will find a home here, and the air will be reinvigorated.

As we wandered through the day Kester shared his love of the place through a journey into the local cemetery. Many of his ancestors had lived and died here, and the beauty and tranquillity of the place capture his imagination still. This is, for him, a place of belonging. In that regard his sensitivity to indigenous Australia is evident; a tree planted by Guboo Ted Thomas strikes its roots in both history and earth. Indeed, when we were to pursue our conversation after the excursion to Bambra, Kester shared and aired some of

his own views about the limits of the 'modern world'. In particular, the soulless enterprise that now masquerades as 'lifestyle'. In the process he told the story of a young indigenous woman who chose to return to 'country' after living in Sydney for a time. Resolved to return to her people, she hopped a Greyhound bus and set out for home. On the journey she had engaged with a friend of Kester's, telling her that she was going back to 'country' because she felt as though her soul was dying in Sydney. Touched by the story Kester spoke about his own attachment to place and the value it holds in his heart. Certainly evident in the modest additions that he has made at Bambra (a small caravan and shed, a bio-loo and a dam) the place has a 'loved' quality to it and emits health and beauty.

What does sustainability mean from your point of view?

As with a couple of other contributors, Kester was not particularly engaged by the idea of sustainability in its more conventional construction. As he put it when asked what sustainability meant from his point of view: "It's a hard question to answer without sounding as though you're just trying to parrot off some definition out of a text book...rather than trying to define it, let me just put it in this context..."

Thereafter, he spoke at length about generalised global dependency on technology and fossil fuel, especially for food distribution. Being in touch with where food comes from and growing one's own food were central issues in the practice of sustainability.

What sustains you personally?

Being able to work with nature was a more personally grounding and sustaining feature of Kester's life. Feeling a part of something bigger than himself – looking up at the sky on a clear night and feeling an almost tangible spiritual sense of being at one with something greater.

Commentary

With a background in environmental management Kester articulated what some contributors alluded to only briefly. In particular, a strong sense of concern about the parlous state of environmental exploitation. Well informed about a host of current issues, including climate change, food production, inappropriate development and so on, he acknowledged that the world would probably go through an inevitable process of population loss before retrieving a way forward that was more sensitised to the need for respect, awareness and balance in managing the earth's resources.

As he put it, "... I know the Earth will survive and some kind of life will survive...and probably human beings will survive – we're very resourceful animals. But I suspect that in the centuries to come the Earth's population will be a lot smaller than it is now, and we'll have gone through a very painful shakedown to get to that point of responsible living."

Themes

Environmental Cohesion

Learning to live with nature as part of it was a core theme that emerged throughout interview. Registering actively through his efforts at Bambra, but extending well beyond it, the aesthetic value, along with a more conventional reading, ecosystems and their integrity occupied much of Kester's thinking about the current challenges that have arisen through untrammelled development and its impacts.

Reliance on non-renewable energy

This theme was reiterated, especially with regard to its potential impacts on food supply more generally. It also extended to the use of technologies that supported supply chain logistics. The concern here was that human beings had become dependent on both technology and fossil fuels to the degree that any destabilisation of either had the potential to impact globally.

Food Security

As with several other contributors, local knowledge about food production, and the commitment to produce locally at the household level was a significant theme.

Scotland

Iona and Mull

In June 2011 I set off for the island of Iona. In the preceding year or so I had undertaken as much secondary research as I could with regard to the history of Iona and the establishment of its ecumenical (intentional) community. I was engaged by the fact that it had been in continuous operation since 1938 and that it currently sustained itself through a range of initiatives that reflected a concern for social and environmental justice. Its Christian ethos had developed to the point where people travelled from a range of countries to work as volunteers, usually for a period of six weeks or so; the purpose, it seemed, was to provide opportunities to participate in a unique way of life that celebrated values of inclusion, service and good works.

Because of my own wish to include spirituality in the repertoire of sustainability-in-practice, and given the enduring nature of this intentional community, I saw some prospect of enriching the research with seldom-considered elements of community life. This was particularly so with regard to the ways in which our views and values inform our actions. Beyond this, I was also engaged by the possibility of finding a broader island community that was not necessarily engaged in the activities of its intentional cohort. Finally, I understood that Iona was a significant tourist destination and wondered what impacts the seasonal flow might have on island life.

As is usually the case in preparing to undertake primary research I went through the process of contacting a representative of the intentional community to flag my interest, along with the possibility of undertaking some research. I received a fairly prompt reply that included an offer to come to the island as a volunteer, but there was no response to my interest in community sustainability, nor indeed to the prospect of speaking with members of the intentional community as part of a research process.

I considered taking up the offer of becoming a volunteer, ultimately reasoning that this might not be good approach. I had some concern about the fact that volunteers lived in shared accommodation and the presence of someone doing research in their midst might prove problematic, particularly because

of the discomfort that this may create. Apart from this, I wanted to be able to move freely about the island and engage with residents beyond the intentional community; the commitment that came with volunteering included a five-day working week, which would have left little time for a more comprehensive process.

In pondering the reasons why I had not received a fuller response I considered that, as far as I was aware, Iona had never been the subject of any primary research. People do not always navigate requests of this type with ease, especially because of the potential for negative ramifications that sometimes follow in the wake of poor research process. At this point I was left to consider my options. I had enough primary research experience to know that any decision to go without the usual prior contact might prove fruitless. Yet that said, I was equally aware that good process and good will tend to offset risk; as a consequence I chose to trust that I would probably make the necessary connections once there.

Iona and Mull: Getting there

Glasgow, June 2011

The journey from Australia to Scotland took about 20 hours or so. Landing in Glasgow mid-morning, I caught a bus to the digs I had booked in Bath Street – a modest hotel that provided bed and breakfast. My intention was to stay in Glasgow for three days in order to acclimatise and tune the ear to the Scottish accent. In addition, the intentional Iona Community had its headquarters in Glasgow and I thought I would use the opportunity to try and make contact and have a face-to-face conversation about my research. Apart from that, I had never travelled to the UK, or indeed any part of the northern hemisphere, and so intended to absorb as much as I could along the way to Iona.

My digs were located in an area of the city that ran parallel to Sauchiehall Street, one of the major precincts in Glasgow that links Galleries, Concert Hall and Theatres. By international standards Glasgow is small, with a population of about 600,000. Despite this, it was and remains something of a cultural hub, with a rich history embedded in its architecture and arts. Straddling the river Clyde, Glasgow is no longer the centre for ship-building that it once was and its pockets of poverty, whilst hidden in some places, are far more exposed in others. During my three-day stay I located the headquarters of the Iona Community but it remained closed for the duration of my time there. Despite this, I resolved to continue on my way and trust that things would work out.

My direct encounters with local Glaswegians were all positive and I found myself drawn to the humour – some of it extremely robust – and the capacity for storytelling that seemed fairly general amongst the people I met along the way. The turn of phrase and easy engagement took me by surprise on a couple of occasions. In one case I was preparing to leave Glasgow for Oban by train and went to the ticket window to purchase a ticket. I was met with a smile and asked if I was over 55. I was a bit taken aback but I was also intrigued. I responded that yes, I had the dubious distinction of being well over 55 and could probably be trusted to behave myself on the journey. The ticket seller laughed and told me that if I was over 55 I could have a concession on the fare. With that, I was given a lot more information about train travel that proved very helpful.

Oban

Next stop, Oban. As a major port of departure Oban lies to the northwest of Glasgow on the west coast. The train journey traverses the highlands and lochs and the two hours or so that it takes pass quickly, in large part because of the spectacular scenery, along with the small stations that carry both their Gaelic and English names.

As a busy train and ferry terminal Oban has the perpetual buzz of movement, with people and cars in a constant process of coming and going. The city is smaller than Glasgow, but condensed around the coastline and adjacent hills. I had booked a room in a small B&B overlooking the Firth of Lorn, which separates Oban from the Island of Mull, to the west. As with the few days spent in Glasgow, my intention was to stay a while and take in the character of the place and also to start walking in earnest. During the train journey to Oban I'd seen enough of the highlands to realize that I'd need to be able to sustain a long walk over steep slopes. Geologically, the terrain was also very different to the parts of Australia through which I had trekked. Everything from basalt rocks to pink granite boulders and sandstone characterised the highland landscape. That and the constant moisture of the place signalled the need for a bit of preparation.

During my few days in Oban I walked in and out of remnant castles and forts that lay hidden in overgrown, out of the way places. Often perched atop steep inclines, these medieval buildings were sinking back into the landscape. Unlike the much-vaunted, heritage-listed buildings of Australia, their preservation had clearly never been a feature of local life and in many respects I was personally glad of that. There was something organic about the way in which these icons of cultural and social life were in the process of being reclaimed by the earth from which they had arisen. Apart from that I noted that there were so many relics that any restoration process would have multiplied the national debt significantly.

In contemplating the differences between Australia and Scotland with regard to the preservation of buildings I decided to take a day or so to look beyond the static, built environment. In search of anything else that might register as

a contrast I went back to Oban's main thoroughfares – its streets and city precinct, the ferry terminal and station, tourist accommodation, the cafes and stores. Ambling along, I slowly realized that there were a lot of animals – specifically, dogs – accompanying their human fellow travellers. That is, actually travelling on trains and ferries, as opposed to being out for an unremarkable daily walk. The same applied to some of the guesthouses and tourist parks – dogs and their owners, clearly holidaying together.

Eventually, the dog-thing got the better of me and I decided to ask the next such accompanied human about their travelling companion. I didn't have to wait long before I encountered a couple disembarking from a ferry. With their small 'scotty' dog tucked under-arm they stopped to lower the animal to the pavement. I walked up a bit tentatively and asked if I could have a chat about their dog. They were a bit bemused but friendly: "Sure ye can..."

I explained that I was from Australia and that travelling through Scotland I'd noticed that people seemed to be free to take their pets on public transport, or with them on holidays. I wondered if I'd got it right, or were their rules that I was missing...

No, there were not. As long as the wee doggy behaved it could go where it would, under supervision. Some places didn't admit animals, but many did. Travelling on public transport was sometimes an issue, depending on the particular mode of transport. But, as a general rule, 'where we go, so can they'...

I thanked them for talking with me and prepared to walk away when the man stopped me with a question. Where I was from, in Australia, did they not allow such things?

No, they didn't – well, not unless you were vision-impaired and had a guide dog. Sometimes, on long-haul public transport you could make an arrangement to take a pet, but it wasn't easy.

And so our conversation extended well beyond the few minutes that I had intended. They were curious about my own feelings on the matter and wanted to know if I had a dog. I engaged, showed them a mobile shot of my undersized Boxer, Stella, and was duly introduced to 'wee Benny', whose manners left nothing to be desired as he sat and smiled up at me.

We strolled towards the wharf-side food precinct, chatting about the differences between countries and the attitudes that we grow up with. In the distance, the sound of bagpipes drifted through the air and they extended an invitation to come along.

Did I like the pipes?

I did, and looked in the direction of the band.

We walked on to an open mall where a group of school kids were in the process of delivering their best to the passers by.

Fionnphort on the Isle of Mull

I left Oban for Iona on a ferry that cruised out though the Firth of Lorn, heading for Craignure, on the eastern shores of Mull. The crossing takes about forty minutes or so and passes Duart Castle, thirteenth century home to chief of the Clan MacLean. The castle sits prominent on the headland of Duart Bay, near Craignure, and holds the history of its origins in the ancient keep, dungeons and clan artefacts. According to local information, it was completely rebuilt in 1912 and today is something of a draw card for historians and tourists.

From Craignure a bus trip took me from the eastern side of Mull to the southwest port of Fionnphort and my final ferry ride to Iona. Too captivated by the sight of Iona across the water I initially took little notice of Fionnphort as I passed through it. The bus stopped and I disembarked hastily, eager to get on the ferry to Iona. As things played out over the next couple of weeks, I was to find myself back in Fionnphort on another mission.

Contributors

Interviews on Iona and Mull took place in June and July 2011.

On Iona

Dot Stewart, Manager, St. Columba Hotel, Isle of Iona

When I met Dot Stewart she had been employed as Manager of the St. Columba Hotel ('the Columba') for about three years. The Columba sustains itself largely through tourism in the more amenable summer months. With its organic vegetable gardens and solar panels, the hotel is a visible landmark on the island. Some years ago, when it came up for sale, a group of residents and interested parties purchased it collectively in the hope of ensuring that it remain in the hands of locals. It proudly supports the use of renewable energy and local produce and stands as an exemplar of low impact development.

Dot's position as Manager combines with her long-term membership of the (intentional) Iona Community. She has been actively involved in many of its initiatives, in particular, the Camas Centre on the Isle of Mull, which she also managed prior to taking up her current position. Now an adventure destination for people looking to engage in a more direct way with the natural environment, the Camas Centre similarly deploys renewable energy initiatives and offers a unique holiday experience that also supports the sustainability of the intentional community.

For a number of years Dot has lived permanently on Iona with her Mum. As she spoke about her affinity for Iona she recounted how she had been coming to the island from the time she was a child. For her, involvement in and membership of the intentional Iona Community has been an enduring influence that shaped her way of living and being in the world.

What does sustainability mean from your point of view?

When asked about what sustainability meant for her, Dot didn't hesitate. As she put it, "For me, sustainability is about community...it's what we have to get us through." She went on to add that the residents live on a small island at

what feels like, "the edge of the world". Inclement weather sometimes stops the usual ferry run from Fionnphort, and occasionally the power goes out.

Dot went on to describe life during the darker winter months, when daylight is overtaken by nightfall at around 3.30pm. With tourism on hold until late autumn, the locals enjoy some downtime from the business of making a seasonal living. People catch up for dinner and sometimes play cards of an evening.

As the conversation unfolded I asked Dot about the interaction between the intentional community members and other residents. I was curious as to whether there was a broadly felt sense of being part of one community, or were there other factors at play. Her response reflected the actual population mix of the island. She noted that there were several communities on Iona – members of the intentional community, permanent residents who were not members, tourists and the staff who came and went with the seasons. Visitors to the intentional Iona Community, most of whom came as volunteers, tended to stay for about six weeks. Tourists generally stayed for a more limited time – usually just a few days. From her point of view there were no obvious tensions and people tended to get on well, irrespective of their membership within those discrete communities. As Dot noted, without tourism and the volunteers who came for a more lengthy stay at the Abbey, Iona would struggle to sustain itself economically. Striking a balance happened organically enough through the vagaries of the seasons, and this also added a dimension to sustainability that is not often considered. That is, time without tourists and others during the winter months was a time of rest and renewal.

One of the more significant issues that Dot raised with regard to sustaining island life was housing. There was, at the time of my stay on Iona, an affordable housing project underway. Responding to the very real need for this most fundamental element of community life, the project was running consultations and looking to extend the limited amount of housing. As with many small, isolated communities, this issue is a mounting concern, especially with regard to attracting new residents who may have a range of skills from which communities could benefit.

What sustains you personally?

In more personal terms, the deeper meaning of sustainability for Dot is found at the Michael Chapel, adjacent to the Abbey. Restored in 1959 this modest place of worship occupies only a fraction of the space of the restored Abbey and is dwarfed by it. When I walked in to take some shots of the interior I was struck by the light and warmth that infused the dark-timbered pews. A hand-carved statue of Saint Columba is prominent but not overbearing and the windows draw the eye to the Sound of Iona onto which they open. The place carries a peace that emanates from the small, intimate space that it occupies.

Commentary

In so many respects, Dot's is an integrated engagement with island life. She clearly values what the intentional community provides, and she also carries a practical knowledge of the sustainability initiatives that come with managing the Hotel. Her own views and values are shared modestly, yet that in no way detracts from her enthusiasm for renewable, sensitive and aesthetic development.

The spiritual dimension of Dot's life is clearly bound to the island and its intentional community, and she exhibits a good humoured, easy rapport with a range of people – from children and young people, to tourists and interlopers such as myself.

One seemingly inconsequential event characterises her general demeanour. It occurred one afternoon as I was searching desperately for a spare USB stick on which to store some photographs. I'd used all of the memory on the remaining sticks and was sure that I had a spare. My frantic search yielded nothing and I knew that I'd have to get hold of a new one, so I took myself off to the local SPAR shop (the small and only supermarket that serves Iona) but to no avail. I caught the ferry across to Fionnphort, to yet another small shop. No luck.

Realizing that I'd probably have to bus it to the other side of the Mull where there was more likelihood of success, I headed back to Iona and thought I'd chance my luck and see if someone at the Columba might have one they

would be prepared to sell me. I walked into the foyer and explained my predicament to the receptionist, whom I'd met on a few occasions. She was happy to help and said she'd have a look about for a spare. Right at that point Dot emerged from her office behind the reception counter and handed me a new USB stick. She had clearly overheard the conversation and just happened to have a spare. I was duly grateful, especially because I now wouldn't have to make the long trip across Mull. I reached for my wallet, happy to pay. Dot smiled and simply said, "No, that's OK...no need", whereupon she turned to go. Whilst I was insistent on paying for this gift from the heavens, she was equally determined to accept no payment, "No, you're welcome – it's nothing."

And that was that.

These sorts of exchanges between people are ordinary enough and happen spontaneously in many circumstances, yet the ease with which Dot handed over what for me was real bounty, struck me as an inherent quality that she carried with her as a normal condition of being. She was always present to what she was doing and I had observed her on a few occasions dealing with people in a very engaged manner.

In the second sequence of the Prelude I recounted how Dot and a young boy interacted during his lunch break from school. So close and easy was their interaction that I quite wrongly assumed that this was her son. The same held true for some of the staff I met as I walked from the Columba to my digs. One young woman in particular spoke with great affection for Dot and how she'd always been helpful to her.

While the ordinary kindness of strangers does often prevail everywhere, the coherence between environmental, spiritual, social and personal dimensions of life are elements of sustainability that can so strongly reinforce the congruence between what we value, and the ways in which we act on those values. This was certainly the impression that I was left with in my dealings with Dot Stewart.

Themes

Human Relationship Building and Community Engagement

Dot's level of connection and engagement with community was a constant theme that extended to all aspects of island life. She was very engaged with community residents, from local primary school children through to the families and others who lived permanently, as well as seasonal staff.

Environmental Awareness

The level and consistency of general awareness about environmental integrity manifest in a range of sustainability initiatives that Dot was involved in. From her position as manager of the St. Columba Hotel, to her previous position on Camas, Dot was an active participant and advocate of well planned, strategies to enhance island life.

Affordable Housing

As a discrete issue, the need for affordable housing on Iona was a consistent theme. The proportion of externally owned properties that are unoccupied for most of the year contrasts sharply with the scarcity of permanent accommodation. This impacts on the capacity of the island to recruit people who have the skill sets to enhance island life in a range of areas.

Post Script: 2013

In revisiting the St. Columba Hotel website recently I learned that since my time on Iona in 2011 Dot has become one of the many owners. Having managed the establishment as a dedicated employee she will no doubt flourish in her more extensive new position and I take this opportunity of wishing her well.

Don Stubbings, long-term member of the (intentional) Iona Community

Don's association with the Iona community extends back to the mid 1970's when he first started to come to the Abbey as a guest. As he got more engaged Don worked at the Abbey as a member of the resident group between 1984 and 1986. In 1986, he joined one of Iona's family groups, which have been in place since the 1950's; they constitute a vehicle through which small groups are drawn together in a mutual support and personal accounting process. The principles that underscore Iona's family groups include a time commitment to the community, a personal commitment to use individual resources well, meeting together, and prayer and bible reading.

The impetus to establish family groups responded to the fact that the intentional Iona Community is a dispersed community, one that extends membership to people living as far afield as Australia, the USA, Canada, Europe and so on. The family groups enable people who live near each other to meet regularly and engage with the precepts of mutual support, commitment and economic witness. Within this context family group members support each other and make collective decisions and determinations about a range of concerns. Currently there are about 30 family groups throughout the UK.

In 1994 Don became a full member of the community. With a keen interest in movements that unified peace and justice, and subsequently in the way in which Iona might be sustained, Don carries a wealth of information about the unfolding of the intentional community since the 1960's. In an interview extending over one and a half hours he recounted his admiration for the politics and spirituality of the community founder, the Reverend George MacLeod, with whom he had occasional contact. Concerned with the principles of 'work and worship', MacLeod drew ministers and craftsmen from Glasgow to rebuild accommodation at the Abbey, which forms the island's religious centrepiece.

Don's own political impulse locates the environment as a justice issue; he observes that 'we are all part of nature', as opposed to being distinctly separated from it. Quoting Kathy Galloway, former leader of the Iona

Community, Don shares her insight that the environment constitutes 'the ground of our being'.

In speaking about the challenges that come with sustaining the community, he recounted the transformation of the Camas Centre, one of the Iona Community's operations on Mull. The site of an old fishing station, the Camas Centre is a 19th century stone building that hosted a range of activities and initiatives, including its use as a retreat in the 1950's and 60's for Borstal Boys – troubled youth who had been removed from schools because of their behaviours. Since that time, the Centre has reinvented itself in order to keep pace with changing demands. About 10 years ago it became an adventure camp that employed trained staff. More recently, there was a concerted move to make it more sustainable as both dwelling and business. In its current incarnation, Camas opened for business about two years ago. After a major refit and repairs, roof tubing and photovoltaic cells gave enhanced capacity to deliver hot water. Located on a hill behind the centre is a wind turbine that delivers electricity through a converter room in the Centre. In addition, Camas is largely self-sufficient through its organic garden, which provides a level of food security. As Don noted, this initiative represents a microcosm of other developments on Mull. Isolated and subject to high energy prices and the vagaries of weather, many farmers and local residents are now attempting to secure a more sustainable future for themselves and their communities.

With regard to the island and its broader community, Don pointed out that while it has only been in the last 10 years or so that people have become familiar with sustainability as both word and concept, the various concerns of island life meant that the same substantive issues had occupied people over a far longer timespan. He cited the issue of sewage and its disposal, which is a significant challenge on the small island. Similarly, the vagaries of weather lead to power cuts from time to time, and this also poses something of a challenge, especially for businesses that rely on electricity for their sustainability. In relation to food he noted that a lot of the ground on the neighbouring island of Mull is not suited to the cultivation of food crops. Whilst sheep and cattle tend to thrive, fruit and vegetables present a greater challenge. Here the issue of food-miles registers as a significant concern,

particularly because much of both islands' needs are met through imports from the mainland, along with other places farther afield in the UK and Europe.

As to the sustainability of the Intentional Community, Don outlined an initiative that commenced about 6 or 7 years ago. In relation to one of the rules of the community - the personal accounting for resources – the broader idea of sustainability practices was added. By implication, this drew members together to think beyond their own personal use of resources and consider how the community might do business more effectively, with due regard for its impacts and environmental footprint. In addition, about 5 years ago an extra clause concerning sustainability was added to the 'justice and peace commitment' to which community members subscribe, thus consolidating sustainability as pervasive consideration in all areas of the community's operations.

Given these two reforms, the community now has a working group that has been in operation since 2010. The remit of that group is to consult broadly and run sessions that draw members together to consider a range of practices that might be adopted. A draft report has been completed and sent to all family groups for input and consideration. At the completion of the process a final report and recommendations will be put to the Iona Community Council, with the expectation that a clear program of action be implemented.

One of the key considerations that Don articulated here was the fact that everyone who journeys to Iona usually travels by air. This extends to at least half of the staff at the Community's centres on both Mull and Iona. As he put it, "That's a huge carbon footprint."

In registering his concern about this issue he noted the paradoxical nature of the problem. On the one hand visitors from as far afield as Canada, the USA, Australia and Europe had helped build the sustainability of the intentional community, yet on the other their sheer numbers challenged the longer term viability of this way of doing business. In addressing this Don flagged the need for more people to be encouraged to come to Iona from Scotland and the

rest of the UK. He also suggested that perhaps some of the overseas visitors could link in with sister communities in Ireland, the USA and Australia.

What does sustainability mean from your point of view?

In unearthing Don's take on sustainability it was through conversation rather than direct questions that the meaning of sustainability revealed itself. Throughout the course of our extensive conversation it became clear that there was little separation between Don's active involvement in the intentional community and his personal life. As we spoke about what sustainability meant from his point of view, the issue of spirituality was a constant motif that merged with the practical elements of day-to-day life. Locating human beings as part of nature, rather than separate from it, led him to consider the consequences of his actions for the various environments and species with which he shares his 'home'. He recalled that the Celtic spirituality is one in which animals are accorded their due. Emblematic of Celtic prayer is the importance of the flocks upon which ordinary people relied. Invariably, Don always returned to the natural environment in his considerations about sustainability. As he put it, "The environment is always a justice issue for me."

What sustains you personally?

For Don the most personal and sustaining elements of life concern the sea. The complexity of the rock pools and the shoreline were preeminent. With considerable enthusiasm he also added the Isle of Staffa as a centrepiece in the sustenance of his own wellbeing. He talked at length about the towering basalt columns, Fingal's Cave and the rest of its geology. Its unique beauty and enduring presence in the seascape of the western Isles also stamps it as one of the great monuments to nature.

Commentary

In so many respects Don's engagement with the sustainability of community life is a natural progression of his own values and beliefs. He lives permanently in Edinburgh where his day-to-day routines include a host of local initiatives. These range from locally grown produce and community markets, as well as activities that support environmental management. From

eco-schools to his ongoing visits to Iona, Don is a constant participant in sustainability-in-practice. Bringing a professional career in engineering with him to these activities has no doubt helped the process, especially with regard to some of the more recent technologies in renewable energy production.

With regard to the spiritual dimension of his life, Don, like Dot, expresses an integrated approach to both the practical and the less worldly. He is a long-serving member of the Iona Community and acknowledges the religious dimension of life. As we spoke about the nature of such profound ecumenism, he pointed out that the intentional Community of Iona was open to anyone: people of faith, or no faith. As a Quaker Don feels free to hold onto the elements of that particular variant of Christian faith, and at the same time engage across spiritual borders.

My own impression of Don's multifaceted approach to life echoes similar sentiments that arose in my dealings with Dot. That is, the enduring ecumenical nature of the intentional community appears to have enriched the lives of these two people and there is, for both of them, a sense of connection to place and a felt responsibility to 'do less harm' to the broader environment. Community is not separate here, but rather very much inclusive of nature as 'the ground of our being'. In every respect, the idea of personal responsibility is one that is writ large in these guiding principles and it manifests in both very personal and extended engagements. My own experience of both Dot and Don is that they meet people with equanimity and openness, perhaps two of the most fundamental requirements in the sustainability of community and social life anywhere. More to the point perhaps, their membership of the ecumenical (intentional) community does not appear to have restricted their broader engagement with those who stand beyond it. This manifests in a sound knowledge of the very real issues and challenges that confront all islanders: affordable housing, education, energy production, waste disposal and so on.

Themes

Eradicating waste

One of the most consistent themes in my interview with Don was his commitment to not wasting resources. He spoke at length about this issue, especially with regard to repairing and restoring, rather than discarding items that may have suffered some wear and tear. As he put it "...waste is an anathema to me."

Environmental Justice and Spirituality

Don consistently referred to his own spiritually grounded position regarding the natural environment. Backgrounding this issue, he spoke about the need to extend social justice to the environment.

Community Engagement

Don was actively engaged in a range of community initiatives, both on Iona and in Edinburgh, his permanent home. These included involvement in eco-schools, as well as local food growing and markets.

Yolande Watson and Andrew de la Haye, Managers, Iona Backpacker's Hostel

At the time of interview Yolande and Andrew held shared responsibility as seasonal managers of the hostel. Conservationists at heart, they had taken on the challenge of selling their respective homes and chattels so that they could ultimately make a broad-ranging contribution through the development of a conservation and well-being centre that they aimed to establish. With a strong sense of felt responsibility towards people, places and environments Yolande and Andrew assumed a level of global citizenship. As they note, much of their time had been spent travelling and working in a voluntary capacity in a range of organizations and businesses. Not only did this support their commitment to civic participation, it also added to the development of their own skills – something that they could take with them and invest in the establishment of the conservation and well-being centre.

In acknowledging that much of their travel was undertaken by air, they always attempted to mitigate their footprint by travelling on public transport, walking and never accumulating more than they actually needed by way of material possessions. As they pointed out, everything that they actually owned fitted into their individual backpacks. When I met them they had been intending to go to India for nine weeks but delays with visas meant that they needed to consider their employment options during the summer months. Having done considerable voluntary work with 'Trees for Life', a conservation platform in Scotland, they ultimately investigated what might be on offer there. Serendipity played its part and they found seasonal work on Iona managing the hostel. This was a place that Andrew had always wanted to visit, in large part because of its reputation as a vibrant, energetic and beautiful place. The much-feted Abbey was similarly a strong draw for both of them. Because their stay on Iona would be limited to the tourist season, they spent most of their downtime walking the island, relishing the open landscape along with the diverse range of people who holidayed at the hostel.

Neither of them had any expectations about the people who made up the island community, but Yolande took the view that, "what's lacking within the island is the social relationships between the different parts of it." She noted

that while she and Andrew were keen to engage and participate as far as possible, they were not seen to *belong* to the community. This led both of them to feeling a level of social isolation. As Andrew observed, all of the seasonal staff on the island constituted a community in their own right. They had both made some good friendships with this group, but Andrew was aware that most of the islands in the Hebrides are “closed communities that don’t particularly like outsiders.” As he noted, this limiting feature of island life meant that he “missed the island community” - something of a loss given his own deep interest in the building of good social relationships.

Engaging with these two people provided an interesting counterpoint to the permanent, seasonal and intentional communities on Iona. Yolande and Andrew saw the flow of people and activities across the island and drew attention to the invisible divide between the church community, permanent residents, seasonal workers and tourists. From their perspective there was very little interaction across these borders and they found the delineation challenging. It is noteworthy that Iona, as with many of the Western Isles, has a cultural history of differentiating ‘in-comers’ (outsiders) from ‘insiders’. Here, the notion of belonging to place is reserved for those who actually reside permanently. The rest are consigned to the category of in-comer, or someone who comes onto the island from the outside.

In the course of our conversation Yolande and Andrew shared some of the other idiosyncratic elements of island life. Because both are vegetarian, access to a range of food was somewhat limited. They needed pulses and a wider variety of vegetables and protein sources than those available in the local SPAR shop (grocery). In attempting to address the issue they asked around, hoping that local knowledge would enable them to find a way through the problem. As Yolande notes, “we didn’t really get any straight answers.” They persisted and eventually discovered that the (food) Co-op in Oban would arrange delivery to Iona and so set about emailing an order. Bearing in mind that Oban is on the mainland, this meant that any food ordered would travel from the west coast of the mainland, across to Mull, and then onto Iona.

In due course the food order was filled and sent, with an estimated time of arrival. Andrew tracked the process and went to meet the ferry at the slip on Iona. After searching and asking any of the locals he could find where he might find his order, no-one either could or would tell him. Confused by this he reasoned that maybe the food had been left at the wharf in Fionnphort, so he took the ferry across - to no avail. Returning to Iona he embarked on a more extensive search, eventually locating said food in a drop box at the top of the Iona slipway. A pick up point for all manner of goods, the oversized wooden box was the last place that Andrew would have looked, yet the clues provided by a couple of locals ultimately led him to his food stash.

Puzzled by what appeared to be a somewhat furtive delivery process, the story eventually unfolded. In keeping with the idiosyncratic processes that guide island life, Andrew was told that people were discouraged from ordering food from off-island providers. Informal understandings tended to set the rules that governed these arrangements; local business was to be kept local, as far as possible.

With this new knowledge Yolande and Andrew were better able to navigate the business of securing their food supply. In addition, they also cultivated their own crops adjacent to the hostel. In a spirit of generosity they offered produce to anyone who might be in need.

While Andrew and Yolande met the challenges of island life with a sense of equanimity and good humour, they remained concerned about the invisible barriers that delineated the various, discrete communities. From their point of view, the entrenched ways in which one might belong – or not – limited a more robust and fruitful engagement between all of the people on the island.

What does sustainability mean from your point of view?

Andrew: "It means living within one's means, at all levels...the same for the whole human race – living within the means of the planet...it's like our nourishment cycle. Give back as much as you take. It's a challenging concept for the human race."

Yolande: "Living in harmony with one's local environment...being resourceful, but not being greedy – just taking what you need and leaving a bit behind, too...leave the land as it was. It's about your own well-being; being in harmony with yourself."

As the conversation opened up, both Andrew and Yolande honed in on the more critical features of contemporary life that had broader ranging impacts. In particular, they saw consumerism as an unsustainable feature of modern life that would, by its very nature, fail to endure. Reflecting on his own transforming attitudes Andrew noted that when we "give up that space within that we hold for material things it creates an opportunity to connect with people in a more meaningful way...so that comes back to community. I think sustainability and community are so related: without the community where's the sustainability?"

What sustains you personally?

Yolande looked to the symbolism of the polished wooden table in the hostel dining area. Representative of people meeting each other she simply said: "That table! That's what sustains me!"

She went on to explain that she had sat with many people, individually and collectively, and engaged in all manner of conversation, along with the laughter and tears that flowed. Some of the guests had found themselves a long way from home and needed a friendly face and ordinary kindness. Others simply needed to be in the company of others in a beautiful environment after their long journeys. For Yolande, the table drew people into connection with each other; the rest flowed from that.

For Andrew, the vegetable patch that he had planted and the beauty of place combined to sustain him. He had met some local people with whom he was happy to pass the time of day, and he walked the island, exploring its natural bounty.

For both, the combination of human relationships, especially within community settings, and the broader physical environment were inseparable features of what sustained them. Manifestly concerned about the current state

of the world, they invested these qualities in voluntary and paid work. Their plans for a conservation and well-being centre constituted a way to bring to ground their own skills, insights and connections.

Commentary

As seasonal staff, Yolande and Andrew provided something of a stark contrast to my conversations with Dot Stewart and Don Stubbings, both of whom had strong and enduring ties to Iona. Unlike Dot and Don, Yolande and Andrew faced barriers to entering community life more fully. As incomers they were not barred from community events or attendance at the Abbey, however, they did nonetheless feel the force of strong, unspoken cultural rules that apply in some places.

In listening to this aspect of their story I reflected on the fact that smaller and more isolated communities are so often held together by the routines and rhythms that order day-to-day life. As an 'incomer' myself most of the people that I met were short stay tourists or seasonal staff. Without exception, all were friendly and engaged easily, as did the few people from Glasgow and Ireland who, whilst not members of the intentional community, made a regular, annual pilgrimage. Staying for a few days at most, all had long-standing connections to the place, some dating back to George MacLeod's time there. By contrast, people who had come to the intentional Iona community as guests or volunteers were more engaged with each other and life at the Abbey, where they attended regular services and participated in a host of church activities. As for the permanent residents who ran small businesses or crofts - they were much less inclined to engage with incomers, whether short-stay tourists, day-trippers or visitors to the Abbey. Usually polite in their interactions, they tended to maintain something of a social distance in their interactions. In many respects, the established order of things on Iona was something that Yolande and Andrew encountered as a limiting feature of their time there. For these two people, community relationships were a valued aspect of their own beliefs and commitments. Yet that said, they did, in my view represent an anomaly with regard to the vast majority of both incomers (visitors) and insiders (residents). That is, the vast majority of people who travel to Iona do so not to build relationships with the various

communities of interest, but rather, to simply enjoy what the island has to offer by way of cultural history, scenery or the intentional community.

This is a general norm in many holiday destinations and the social dynamic on Iona is further impacted by the seasonality of Island life. Throughout the year all routines are orchestrated by quite specific weather conditions and the flow of people that sustains the tourist industry is short-lived and ephemeral. Not surprisingly, then, the vast majority of permanent residents who make their living in this manner are unlikely to invest in the development of relationships that will extend for the short duration of the tourist season. For them, life is busy, demanding and sometimes layered with the cultural traditions that underscore social relationships. This aspect of island life created a level of concern for Yolande and Andrew, yet it is not uncommon as a feature of community life in many places, especially where tourism is a primary source of income.

Themes

Human-Relationship Building and Community Engagement

Both Yolande and Andrew had a long history of community involvement across a broad suite of initiatives. At the heart of their activities was a clear imperative to engage people in creative approaches to environmental preservation and enhancement. This included involvement in 'Trees for Life', an environmental project that operates in Scotland and elsewhere, as well as conservation weekends and similar activities.

Conservation

In relation to the notion of conservation, both Yolande and Andrew had a far broader appreciation of the relationship between conservation activities and human well-being. Such was their shared level of commitment here that they had sold their homes with the intention of eventually establishing a conservation and well-being centre. Linking these two features of community life, the intention was to create opportunities to fuse environmental care and enhancement with human physical and mental health.

Jamie Prescott, Maintenance Staff, Iona Backpackers Hostel

This interview was conducted in a small caravan adjacent to the Backpackers Hostel. For the duration of the interview the background noise of rain on the roof permeates the DVD sequence.

As with Yolande and Andrew, Jamie had been looking for work and had chanced upon a job advertisement for the Iona Hostel on the Gum Tree website. When we met he had been employed as a maintenance worker for about two months. Born and raised in the small village of Lochgoilhead, near Loch Lomond, Jamie's personal history was one in which a love of land and sea had shaped his working life.

With a population of 300-400 people, Lochgoilhead was the proving ground for all manner of youthful adventures and learning. It was also the place from which Jamie and of his friends went out into the world; all now live a long way from Lochgoilhead, something that Jamie attributes to the fact that they had to become relatively independent from an early age. All went to high school some distance from home and had to board at a hostel through the school week. As a consequence, the business of being away from home became a norm by the time kids were about 12 years old. In combination with the way in which they played and learned in the natural environment, this feature of village life instilled a love of travel to far away places. As he noted: "Three of my friends now live in New Zealand...one went to the North Pole...another friend has sailed all around the world. There's only a small number of people from this village – we've all done so much – we've all been so far. My brother's the same, he's been all around the world." In keeping with his friends Jamie has also travelled extensively, embracing new and diverse environments.

Commenting on this shared tendency to go out into the world Jamie said, "I do put that down to the fact that we come from such a small place..."

In effect, this small place was well known to Jamie and his friends before they left it and in many respects constituted a push-factor to see the world. More to the point, perhaps, the *way* the world was met always centred on the primacy of physical, natural environments and the various means by which they could be explored – boats, kayaks, hiking and so on.

Given the weight of this personal history, it seems fitting that Jamie was to become an artisan-traveller who developed high order skills in woodworking and related crafts. He had built homes, renovated buildings and produced bespoke artefacts as a way of life, rather than a job. His passion for the natural environment made him a keen kayaker who spent his days off navigating small neighbouring islands near Mull and Iona. An accomplished photographer, Jamie's love of his home was patently clear. His stories of landscape, trees and native animals were embodied in an expanded range of still photographs.

Perhaps one of the greatest sources of distress for Jamie was the decimation of Scottish hardwood forests, along with the disruption of native wildlife. His abiding respect for the life of a simple tree was best expressed when he told the story of a small, turned wooden bowl that he had made. A fixture in the grounds of the local outdoor sports centre in the town where he grew up, the 'tulip wood tree' (a variety of magnolia) from which it was crafted had outgrown the space it had occupied for many years. Sixteen years ago, the woman who ran the centre made a decision to have it cut down and professionally milled so that it could be stored properly. Subsequently, Jamie was gifted a portion. When I encountered the small bowl its history was as much a part of it as its physical form.

For Jamie, telling the story of any timber was important - important because it represented a life that should be acknowledged and known. As he put it: "Yeah, so I know this tree as a child, and that's something special to me...you can go to a wood store or a saw mill and you can buy timber, but you don't know where that timber came from. I like the fact that I know this tree, I know where it came from - it grew in my village...Ideally, if I sold a bowl to someone, or a piece of furniture, I would like to be able to give them a photograph of the tree when it was alive, or at the very least tell them where that tree grew, which village, which forest it came from, or which storm blew that tree down...You, know, I don't want to take a photo of a tree and then cut it down - if a tree comes down in a storm, then that wood, if someone doesn't get hold of it, it'll go to firewood...In the cities, the amount of Scottish hardwood that goes into landfill is disgusting... "

What does sustainability mean from your point of view?

Not surprisingly, Jamie's view of sustainability was bound to the cycles and continuities embedded in the natural environment, in particular, trees. He noted that "we've got lots of trees in Scotland, but it's not infinite." Speaking of Iona, he took the view that while there were not many trees on the island, there was a time when there were probably plenty, but "...they all get used up...once the trees are gone, it's hard to plant them again because there's no protection from the weather..." Referring to the willows that had been recently planted near the hostel he noted: "You need what John's done here...planting the willows...those willows come up so high and then it gives cover for others that come after."

What does sustainability mean for you personally?

"You know, I just want to be happy..." referring back to the natural environment, he said "That makes me feel good". The rugged diversity of Iona itself - especially all of the different waterways and beaches - serve to sustain him in a manner that resonates with a deep love of land and sea. Being alone with it and knowing the peace that comes from solitude in a beautiful environment was, for Jamie, the source of happiness.

Commentary

The time I spent with Jamie was largely occupied by discussion about physical environments and their aesthetic-ecological value. Constant references to his home village of Lochgoilhead tended to reinforce this element of his ongoing relationship with place. In moving out into the world as an adult, the search for work inevitably involved employment opportunities that fed this aspect of his character. For example, he had built and restored dwellings in beautiful environments, most recently a Yoga Retreat in Scotland. In addition, the business of travelling was not simply motivated by the will to see the world. It also involved the more concrete challenge of actually securing a job during a period of relatively high unemployment. That he has been able to navigate a love of the environment and combine this with work is, perhaps, testament to his ingenuity and skills.

In relation to his views about community sustainability, Jamie was one of the participants who tended to stay with his own language and mode of

expression. In that regard, his notion of community was infused with connection to native flora and fauna. He talked occasionally about people, but only in so far as his own values applied. That is, he related easily to people who valued the physical environments about them, but was not overly engaged by the machinations of the broader social world. In that regard, material things had their purpose, but only in so far as they were vehicles to access the environments he loved – his kayak, camera, camping gear and so on. Producing physical artefacts was similarly imbued with his love of the environment, rather than as a business that he pursued for personal gain.

One of Jamie's significant attributes was his capacity to share his knowledge and enthusiasm about these overriding environmental issues with the people about him. He had been on Iona for a very short time, yet he knew about its flora and fauna in considerable detail. This particular quality was something that he took with him on his many journeys. Through conversation I discovered that Jamie made it his business to learn as much as he could about the places he passed through – knowledge he carries as a matter of course. Importantly, he also travelled into those diverse environments, grounding that knowledge in ways that were occasionally a bit risky. One example, recounted with considerable humour, illustrates his adventurous spirit.

During our first meeting, after establishing that I was from Australia, Jamie had asked me whether I'd seen all of my own country – the 'outback' in particular. Once assured that I would know something about the location in which this story played itself out he then told me the tale of his visit to far north Queensland and the Gulf Country. For the reader unfamiliar with this part of Australia, the 'top end', as it's known, is a tropical and sub-tropical landscape, subject to the seasonal monsoons that sweep in from southern Asia.

In Australia for the first time, Jamie had secured a job of sorts, crewing on a yacht that was heading along the far north Queensland coast. Engaged by the tropics and with a love of the sea already running through his veins, Jamie set out with great gusto, relishing the new environment. Eventually reaching a set of rivers and mangrove swamps, he and a couple of the crew put out in

the tender (small dinghy) to explore the rivers. With none aboard having any real knowledge about the potential dangers ahead of them they decided to “go looking for crocodiles...”

At this point I winced visibly and chided him: “Probably not the smartest move you’ve ever made, right?” To which he laughed, replying that, much to their surprise, they’d “actually found them...”

Recounting how they had to skedaddle out of the place his eyes widened. Not realizing the actual size of the crocs they were all terrified, realizing they’d probably be breakfast if they didn’t beat a hasty retreat.

Now in his mid-thirties, Jamie’s way of living is, by his own telling of it, well set. His aim in life is to eventually gather the funds to have his own place, one that will house “a good workshop” where he can live out his passion for the woodworking he so enjoys. Beyond that, he stays connected to his friends, some of whom have returned to Glasgow from their own adventures. From time to time they all go camping together, but in the main, Jamie heads off on his own to meet his ‘neighbours’, whatever local form they take.

Themes

Connection to place and the natural environment

Unlike many other contributors Jamie’s primary focus was the natural environment, along with flora and fauna. Recounted through stories of his growing up, it was clear that a sense of place and belonging flowed from a deep relationship with the natural world. While he did speak occasionally about time spent with friends, the importance of the natural environment was an overriding theme.

Inappropriate development

In keeping with his love of trees Jamie spoke at length about the decimation and waste of Scottish hardwood, which caused him considerable distress.

On Mull

Gillian Cummins, Proprietor, Staffa House, Fionnphort (Mull); former resident musician, Iona Community

Gillian and her partner had been living on the Isle of Mull for about four years when we met. They are currently owners of Staff House, a small B&B close to the slipway at Fionnphort. Prior to that time they had been resident members of Iona's Intentional Community for about two years; Gillian had been a musician and her partner a cook.

The sunroom at Staffa House sits high enough to catch an uninterrupted view across the Sound of Iona. On the eastern shore the Abbey occupies much of the landscape and as Gillian talked about life in the intentional community she reflected on the intensity of her time there. For the members, belonging to the Iona Community meant complete engagement – with each other, and with the central precepts that guided them. In so many respects members are accountable - to themselves and to each other - for the way in which they live their lives, and by implication, for the resources that they consume.

Gillian acknowledged that her time on Iona had been extremely demanding yet equally rewarding. As she noted, the community's concern for social justice and environmental issues is fused with spirituality – to the point where neither she nor her partner could separate spirituality from its more grounded expression. Gillian pointed out that she brought all that she had learned on Iona with her and now lived out her concern for justice and equality in every aspect of her life. As she noted, "For us, the spiritual and social and political things all do come together...there's not just one of them motivating us, it's all of them... For far too long the church has separated itself from important political and social and economic issues...the thing about Iona is that it refuses to separate itself from those issues."

Her time on Iona had clearly imprinted itself on her way of navigating the more ordinary community of Fionnphort. At home in small towns and villages, Gillian was "not bothered by being away from shops and cinemas" and the offerings of city life. She also embraced the level of intimacy at work

in Fionnphort. As she put it, people knew each other's business and nothing much remained hidden; what people might regard as private in many communities was more or less public in Fionnphort. More to the point, she had no problem with this way of being because "...it just brings home how interconnected we all are, and how much better life is if we all just recognize that and help each other." Apart from these elements of local life, the innate wisdom embedded in the community was accorded significant value. For Gillian this resonated with her own personal history and relationship with her grandparents.

In so far as her own engagement with sustainability is concerned, Gillian was one of a handful of newer residents who hoped to mobilise locals on a mission to turn Fionnphort into a Transition Town. She saw the obvious benefits and had tried, thus far without success, to fire up local interest. The busy-ness of the summer months, when everyone was engaged in earning a living, coupled with a way of life that had endured for many decades, combined to produce a level of resistance to 'the new'. As we discussed these issues, Gillian also observed that the locals who had lived in Fionnphort all their lives were less likely to embrace new initiatives in the same way as more recently arrived residents. Many of these newcomers were better off financially and had also enjoyed the benefit of a more comprehensive formal education, leaving them open to sustainability initiatives characteristic of the Transition Towns Movement. Apart from anything else, the language was familiar to them. This contrasted sharply with local attitudes, where there was, perhaps, no felt need to be organised into a more clearly identifiable group that had to establish its bona fides. In short, things ticked over as they had always done, and change was somewhat slower than in the more developed and urbanised environments where the new movement had taken hold.

On a day-to-day basis, Gillian and her partner were establishing their own vegetable garden and doing their best to live modestly, without needless waste. Staffa House was testament to their efforts, especially because the building was warm and homely, with well-tended grounds. In addition, Gillian's rapport with locals was easy and supported the more vernacular

economy that saw jobs done, not so much for money-payment, as neighbourly exchange and support.

What does sustainability mean from your point of view?

In keeping with her overarching values and practices, sustainability combined the connections between people, along with a level of personal responsibility for the way the broader environment is supported. Guided by a spiritual framework, this led Gillian to an integrated approach to the way in which she lived her life. Local knowledge and the will to understand the history and rhythm of life in Fionnphort were important aspects of this process, especially in so far as local engagement in sustainability initiatives was concerned. As she noted, "...it may take a longer time to get things moving in a more organized way..." but that was an inherent part of living at a slower pace of life in a very small community.

What sustains you personally?

As with many contributors, the natural environment fed into a more personally sustaining relationship with place. A keen hiker, Gillian loved the solidity and presence of the large, pink granite boulders scattered around the shoreline of Mull. In addition, the sea and the sky extended the inclusiveness of her relationship with the physical environment. The overarching rhythm of changing seasons combined to instil a sense ease and security, especially because the elements constitute a constant and reliable register of life itself.

Commentary

Gillian carried her knowledge and experience with her into the life of her current home. Like Don Stubbings and Dot Stewart, her experience as a member of the Iona Community had left its mark. Concerned equally with people and environments, Gillian impressed as someone with a very balanced view of life. Spirituality and daily life sat well together, unified by a deep connection to environment.

Her attempts to mobilise the Fionnphort locals in a Transition Town venture constituted something of a learning experience. Initially frustrated by an apparent lack of local will to engage, Gillian navigated the possibilities and

opportunities that arise when we are prepared to know the place we occupy. Rather than persevering and trying to impose a 'great idea' on reluctant locals, she turned instead to reconsidering some of the more fundamental differences between worlds old and new. Looking to things as they are, rather than as she wanted them to be, Gillian indicated that she would search out alternative ways of engaging her neighbours in a less well-orchestrated process; one that honours the rhythm of their lives, along with the cultural history that still prevails.

Themes

Unification of spirituality, social and political issues

In similar fashion to Don Stubbings, Gillian consistently registered a view that her spirituality was integrated with social, political and environmental issues. She valued her time as a member of the Iona Community because of the degree that it promoted this fusion.

Connection to nature and the elements

Unlike other contributors Gillian was very much attuned to the change of seasons as a register of connection to place. This played out in a discussion about the harsher winter months, which most people did not enjoy. For Gillian it constituted a deeper sense of belonging and participation in the natural rhythms of life.

Human-Relationship Building and Community Engagement

At the time of interview Gillian was in the process of trying to mobilise the small township of Fionnphort into establishing itself as a transition Town. Seeing the value of co-operation, as well as the more pressing consideration of sustaining an isolated community, the importance of human-relational bonds was consistently prominent.

Salen Primary School students, 2011 Winners of the UK-wide TOTAL Green Schools Award

My meeting with many of the young students at Salen Primary School came on a day of celebration, and quite by accident. I had been staying at a B&B in Salen and had spent some time speaking with the owner, Heather. She was interested in what I was doing in Scotland and stopped me one morning before I left to go out for a walk. She suggested that I might like to go with her and son Dominic up to the local primary school because the kids had won the 2011 TOTAL Green School Award. She thought it might be good to take a look at what they'd achieved, and apart from that it could be fun!

The significance of the award is perhaps best understood in terms of its context, which covers all of the UK and extends to 7-11 year olds in Primary Schools. For such a small school in an isolated location the impact of the award was immense. Quite apart from the £1,000 first prize, the pride in what was a broad ranging an ongoing initiative reaffirmed for the kids the value of their efforts in recycling, food production and the creation of habitats for endangered species (bats, hedgehogs, insects and so on)³⁸¹.

With a school population of about 80, the various initiatives were substantial and ranged from a small micro-climate garden established for endangered birds, insects and flora, along with recycling, composting and vegie gardens. A troop of 10 and 11 year olds was set the task of escorting parents and friends around the complex on a guided tour. What impressed most was the pride, knowledge and enthusiasm of these young people, who really knew their stuff. Lots of chatter, laughter and easy engagement with adults also characterised the day.

What hit home for me as an outsider was the general effect of the day. The streets and public places of this small village buzzed as I walked home. Everyone was proud and people engaged easily with each other – the old, the young, the Mums and Dads, neighbours and shopkeepers alike.

³⁸¹ "Salen wins Green School Award", *Round and About: Mull and Iona*, Vol. 18, No. 1, July 2011, p.16

Commentary

Throughout the course of the day I learned that Scotland (and the rest of the UK) was part of an eco-schools initiative in primary schools. This environmental initiative had been bedded down at primary school level as a direct engagement policy. Gardens, recycling, composting, food production, habitat development and so on were all part of the process, though the emphases vary according to specific contexts.

When I engaged directly with my 'tour-guides' – two boys in their final year – the extent of their knowledge and enthusiasm was palpable. I was walked through the entire schoolyard (which was fairly extensive) and regaled with stories about particular old trees, finches and the small 'nest camera' via which the chicks were monitored. Far from being an exercise in pride alone, the two boys who stepped me through their school clearly loved the place.

In considering the depth of their engagement I was reminded of my meeting with Jamie Prescott on Iona. Growing up in Lochgoilhead had infused his life with a deep connection to place, species and environments. As I listened to the two boys on my guided tour the echo of Jamie's insight resonated – my hope being that the two boys before me would similarly carry their love of place and connection to it with them through life.

On a more general note, the festivities at the school were fulsome. Notably, the kids mixed easily and well with everyone present, quite unselfconscious about dancing and singing and generally participating.

Chapter 7

Research Outcomes

Introduction

Before proceeding to the Research Outcomes, two less explicit considerations that I carried into the primary research warrant some coverage.

First consideration

Informed by some of the earlier cited material regarding the political character of social research, I took the view that if we can't look to ourselves as *participants* as well as researchers then any dialogue that we enter into is limited, constrained and less than authentic. To be clear, I acknowledge the need to sweep away personal bias in any social research enterprise. But at the same time, I also put the case for authentic engagement with the substance of that research. For me this meant developing what I characterise as a level of critical subjectivity that extended to being as informed as possible about the context of the research – social, environmental, cultural, historic, economic – as well as being clear about my own motivations and personal views. In combination, the knowledge that informs any project is inevitably drawn into a direct, though not always acknowledged association with the subjective views and values of researchers. In my view, the coupling of these elements of the research practicum constitutes the engine that drives it.

Second Consideration

The notion of reflexivity as an embedded and essential feature of good research practice is well established. Yet that said, I took the view that the actual application of reflexive practice does not always extend far enough in relation to our own subjective engagements. To be clear, reflexivity in its best application is a dialectical process, one in which I give consideration to any impacts I may have on participants, and just as importantly, on any impacts that they may have on me. Moreover, when those impacts demand that I adjust my own perspective, values, or position then I must reorientate the research accordingly and acknowledge the 'gift' that informs such a transformation.

While it is very much the case that some research modalities, such as Participatory Action Research³⁸², account for and support co-creative engagements between researcher and participants, the fact remains that most social research is generally 'controlled', to a greater or lesser extent, by researchers. One element of this control is the insistence that we remain 'neutral' (or worse still, 'objective'), unsullied by researcher bias. Feeding into this rubric is a normalising process that ensures social researchers seldom occupy the same ground as research subjects and can thus claim the warrant of objective, neutral and detached engagement.

In choosing to develop a way through the challenges that arose in relation to both of the considerations outlined above, I opted to craft what I considered to be a more authentic approach to the primary research. That is, in acknowledging the need for equivalence between human and non-human, I also adopted the position that there was a need to level the relationship between 'researcher and researched', as far as was reasonably possible. In taking this approach, my hope was to deepen the understanding and appreciation of those forces at work that are brought to bear in actually sustaining communities of place.

Outlined below are the emergent themes that were drawn from all research sites. They represent the more consistent themes that were elicited in interview.

³⁸² Participatory Action Research in its more engaged form owes much to its foundations as a vehicle for social change. This was a research process that unified researchers and participants in a field of common struggle. The power differential operating in the developing countries of Africa, South America and Asia led to a radicalizing of primary research process, one that incorporated 'research subjects' into crafting and designing the research itself. The opportunity that this created was one in which the education and human rights of 'the researched' actually leveled the field of investigation. Research became both process and outcome directed, with the result that pervasive and enduring social challenges – poverty, gender and generational oppression, homelessness – were placed on the national, political agendas of many countries. The linkages that were drawn between research, education and empowerment were made manifest in this partnership between social research and social justice. Ultimately, many of the people on the receiving end of these injustices became researchers in their own right and as a direct result of their involvement with more experienced researchers. See: Conrad, D. & Campbell, G. (2008), 'Participatory Research: An Empowering Methodology with Marginalized Populations', in Liamputtong, P. & Rumbold, J. (2008), *Knowing Differently: Arts-based and Collaborative Research Methods*, Nova Science Publishers, New York.; McIntyre, A. (2008), *Participatory Action Research*, Sage Publications, California

Emergent Themes

All interviews elicited a range of personal-subjective information specific to individual contributors. In assessing the content of each interview a consistent set of themes emerged across all community sites. These are outlined below, though not in ranked order.

1. Human Relationship Building and Community Engagement

Whatever its particular construction, community sustainability rested on the notion that human relationships were a precursor to a fuller engagement with sustaining the towns and villages represented here. With only one exception, this emerged as a consistent theme, evidenced in a range of activities that supported local initiatives. From the neighbourhood or street, to broader community level, co-operation, mutual support and awareness were drawn into activities ranging from a Food Swap, street-level food growing, social support processes for older men, and those more extended and planned processes that took up the need for 'sustainability plans', as with the case of the intentional community of Iona.

2. Connection to Place

Without exception, connections to place registered just what community meant and the value attributed to it. This sense of felt connection was manifest in the aesthetic-spiritual as well as the more practical elements of local life. In almost all cases, connection to place implied connection to both human and natural elements of the locale, manifest in both knowledge and direct engagements.

3. Environmental Awareness and Cohesion

The relationships between people, place and natural environments supported a grounded sense of belonging. Broader physical environments tended generally to engender cohesion between people and place and the level of awareness generally evident in most interviews rested on the notion of coherent relationships between species and the physical elements of place. In some cases, the more challenging aspects of local environments had served to sensitise general awareness, especially on Iona and Mull, where weather patterns and the change of seasons had their own impacts.

4. Food Security

A more practical element of sustainability was the felt need for food security at the local level. Most contributors were aware of the current challenges in food production, distribution and availability and most were engaged individually or collectively in growing food. From domestic fruit and vegetable growing, to the organic garden that supported the St. Columba Hotel, food was a critical theme. In some cases this level of awareness extended to the accumulated 'food miles' that resulted from internationalised production processes and consumption patterns.

5. Recycling/Eradicating waste

There was a high order awareness of waste that emerged from a strong critique of contemporary consumerism. In one case the dumping of Scottish hardwood registered a significant example of the extent of waste; for most contributors the haphazard way in which goods and services were regularly and generally superseded was similarly consistent, to the degree that many actively participated in recycling ventures. From a home built in large part from recycled materials, to the business of repairing and preserving objects, an acknowledged need to reduce the impacts of waste was consistent.

6. Inappropriate Development and Housing

In many respects this theme arose through discussions about the character of local communities, particularly as they were impacted by the spread of poorly planned development. Discussions here picked up concerns about the nature of urbanisation, as well as sprawling housing estates that had become a consistent feature of development in Australia (especially around Melbourne). Excessive housing cost and the normalizing of larger properties as a feature of development contrasted sharply with attempts to generate affordable housing, especially on Iona.

Evaluation of the Communographic Framework

Research Elements and Methods

The following Evaluation of Research Elements and Methods was developed in order to register any strengths or deficits that the communography carried. Given that I had chosen to part company with some of the more conventional approaches to social research, I include it here in order to provide a transparent account of the process.

Research Questions and Research Aims

1. What **meaning** does sustainability hold at the individual level?

The intention to develop a more specific and personalised rendering of sustainability contrasted sharply with conventional definitions, attributes and characteristics. In creating a space within which 'sustainability' wasn't prescribed or defined a more organic, place-based set of responses emerged. The relative value of this question was that it did elicit some quite specific iterations of sustainability that are currently being applied in various community settings.

In lifting out responses to this question and assessing any consistent themes, the relative value of *meaning* arises in relation to the concrete examples of its expression. For example, specific activities, initiatives and projects tended generally to flow from the ways in which people participated in their local communities. Sustainability could therefore take its place as something that involved human-to-human relationships, as well as human-environmental engagements.

By using the word 'sustainability' an opportunity arose to actually assess whether it was appropriate as a way of describing how we sustain ourselves and the local lifeworld of community. For a couple of participants it was not a word they liked or used. In fact, one person actually avoided its use. That said, it was a familiar word to everyone interviewed.

2. What **personal values** inform individual views of community life and its sustainability?

This question elicited a range of responses that concerned everything from personal spirituality and ethics, to necessity and the value of human relationships as a foundational building block of local life. Manifest in a felt connection between people, place and nature, as well as the desire to actively sustain them, values tended to translate into a consistent level of direct engagement with diverse renderings of sustainability. Significant was the notion of conserving. That is, not wasting resources, recycling where possible and sharing as a grounding principle. At its heart, the notion of value centred on respect and engagement. By contrast, many contributors spoke about the impacts of unplanned or inappropriate development as an anathema to sustaining community life.

The relevance of this question to notions of sustainability arose out of the ways in which personal values steered actions and initiatives. By contrast, the plethora of international initiatives that aimed to take up the cause of sustainability through consensus more usually avoid any such reckoning. Rather, tacit assumptions and generic strategies with regard to the overriding importance of development continue to find little effect in actually addressing the need for sound governance, much less mitigating degradation and damage.

With these considerations in mind, the place of ‘values’ was critical to a fuller appreciation of the ways in which sustainability is enacted.

3. What **guiding precepts or intentions** help activate specific, individual engagements in community life?

The range of guiding precepts and intentions was extensive and revealed the fact that direct, personal expertise and skills tended generally to combine with personal values. This was certainly the case for almost all contributors and intentions were generally activated in a modest manner and tended to reflect skill sets. The knowledge base of almost everyone interviewed was well developed and applied in an informed way in community settings.

It is notable that this feature of sustainability is largely absent from international environmental brokerage and governance. Rather, science is generally drawn into the business of informing decision-makers about mitigation and management strategies, to the degree that the place of values (and ideologies) is more usually avoided. Imperatives here rest generally with the need to secure continuities in (economic) development, rather than on disclosures about the orientation and nature of that development. In short, the international arena is characterised by the rational, not the relational.

Returning momentarily to Adams' earlier cited concerns about the 'overworked and tired' status of sustainability in the international domain³⁸³, it is evident that both the context and the questions we ask need to be recalibrated to reflect the *actual substance* of what it takes to sustain any environment. In my view this must include clear disclosures about both guiding precepts and intentions so that specific engagements with sustainability can be monitored, assessed and adjusted under international environmental (and social governance) arrangements. Currently this is not the case.

The Research Questions and Aims were generally useful in guiding the concrete elements of the research, in particular, the interview questions. In many respects the overriding aims were carried through the responses. In turning to an Evaluation of the Research Elements and Methods an assessment of the degree to which they were met is outlined.

³⁸³ Adams, W.M. (2008) *The Future of Sustainability: Re-thinking Environment and Development in the Twenty-First Century* (Report on the Renowned Thinkers Meeting, 29-31 January 2006), IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) www.iucn.org

Evaluation of the Research Methods

All of the methods applied within the primary research process tended generally to fit the context for which they were designed.

Informal on-site Engagement and Relationship Building

Informal on-site engagement and relationship building accounted for the need to simply *be* in the local environment without the influence of a more structured recruitment processes. In the process I met many people along the way and conversations here and there were often helpful, referencing various histories of place that encompassed personal stories and so on.

Presence in Community: Unobtrusive Observation

The business of being *present* in community meant walking through the landscape, navigating assorted flora and fauna and generally developing a level of personal attunement. In so far as I was concerned with the co-constructed nature of communities of place, this tended to steer the gaze toward the elements and weather, as well as topographic and geological features of place.

Informal conversational interview

Informal conversational interviews relied on set questions that were left open. For example: What does sustainability mean from your point of view? What sustains you personally? In the course of delivering their responses, all contributors raised issues that led directly to subsequent questions. This gave the process a flow that was more authentic than may have otherwise been the case had I chosen a more definitive path. The additional value of this approach became more evident when participants suggested others that I might speak with. In those cases I followed leads, which resulted in a broader range of relevant contributions.

Accurate Representation: Analysis and Evidence

The decision to take a *thematic* approach with regard to research outcomes was grounded in the nature of the research itself. As qualitative, primary research, the sample size was small, and the level of representativeness insufficient to support thorough analysis. This is particularly so in relation to

any attempt to classify the content of interviews as 'data' that can be analysed.

As Erikson notes:

...the corpus of materials collected in the field are not data themselves...Fieldnotes, videotapes, and site documents are not data. Even interview transcripts are not data. All these are documentary materials from which data must be constructed through some formal means of analysis³⁸⁴.

Further to this, Lincoln³⁸⁵ cautions that '...data and information are not evidence until two things happen: first, someone recognizes it as data, and second, an inquirer subjects it to some form of systematic analysis, which turns it into evidence directed toward some question or argument.'

In effect, variability across a small population sample cannot be subjected to critical or discursive analysis, especially in circumstances where open-ended questions apply. In a bid to present interview content as it relates specifically to the questions posed, I chose to develop a coding process that enabled the capture of emergent themes. Each theme was elicited from individual interviews and is specific to them. That said, *some* thematic consistency did emerge across all research sites and they are outlined in the Emergent Themes, below.

Researcher Commentary: Reflexivity

The *researcher commentary* that appears with each interview summary constitutes my own reflexive account of individual engagements with participants. It follows the process of interview and accounts for some of the impressions that I developed about place, personal contributions and community initiatives. In addition, I account for my own willingness to engage directly with one of the participant groups that was indirectly involved in the primary research: the Men's Shed Project in St. Leonards

³⁸⁴ Cited in Freeman, M., de Marrais, K., Preissle, J., Roulston, K, and St. Pierre, E. (2007) 'Standards of Evidence in Qualitative Research: An Incitement to Discourse', *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 27

³⁸⁵ Lincoln, Y.S. (2002), *On the nature of qualitative evidence*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Sacramento, CA, p. 6., cited in Freeman, M., de Marrais, K., Preissle, J., Roulston, K, and St. Pierre, E. (2007) 'Standards of Evidence in Qualitative Research: An Incitement to Discourse', *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 27

Eliciting Themes

Themes were drawn from the accumulated interviews after coding was completed. This was made easier because I had recorded all interviews and could replay conversations to check that consistency did apply to each theme. That said, in no way would I generalise to a broader population the specific attributes of those themes. In fact, I suspect that there would be some significant variation had I chosen to conduct this research across both urban and rural environments.

The Development of Digital Artefacts

The digital artefacts were developed with the consent of all participants and are available for teaching and exhibition purposes. With regard to the photographic stills, I was responsible for almost all of them, though I also included some archival stills that are not subject to copyright.

In acknowledging that digital methods are not new to social research, I note that a less obvious value lies in the artefacts that emerge. Here a level of reciprocity between researchers and the people who contribute so much to the practicum is made possible in two ways. Firstly, contributors have reflected back to them their place in the process. Secondly, they emerge with artefacts that can be more broadly shared through exchanges between individuals and communities, which may evoke conversations, discussions, and sometimes inspirations.

Ethics: Probity and Transparency

As with orthodox ethical practice, participants exercised informed consent through all stages of the primary research process. In addition, the exclusion of some interview material was undertaken to ensure that contributors were not placed in a compromising position. I consider that this element of social research is as important as any of the more standard practices, particularly because of the need to preserve communal relationship

Additional considerations

In the course of developing an evaluation framework I considered the need to review any deficits that arose in the methods.

The Sampling Frame

One consideration that warrants some attention is the sampling frame. As noted earlier, an unanticipated opportunity arose to capture the efforts of primary school age children in Salen. Reflecting on their direct engagement with community life and the sweep of initiatives that had drawn them into a substantial relationship with their home environment, I noted the age-limits of the sample.

In most cases, interviewing children or young people under the age of 18 years is not advisable, for a range of quite obvious reasons, notably the issue of informed consent. That said, I now consider that the age cohorts that I did include were not sufficient to account for the generational range of people that may be engaged in sustainability practices. In the case of this research I accounted (very generally) for a two generational representation: 30-50 and 50-70 years. My view now is that this needs to extend to the 20-30 year cohort, and where appropriate to young people and children under 18 years of age.

Culture and Ethnicity

A second issue that warrants some consideration concerns culture and ethnicity, particularly in relation to the dissemination and enactment of shared, collectively held ideas, values and identities. In that regard I had made a deliberate decision to avoid reference to culture and ethnicity in interview questions unless participants raised it themselves. While I acknowledge that there are specific, culturally grounded practices that do apply in some places, especially with regard to the care and nurture of local lifeworlds, I chose to deflect entanglement with such specific characterisations by simply engaging generally. In large part this was because a tighter level of (cultural) focus had the potential to obscure a more pervasive sense of connection and belonging that was broadly shared across the cultural divide.

In the case of Australia, two of the research participants had an indigenous heritage but chose not to emphasise this, or indeed to ask that it be included as a feature of interview. That said, it does bring the issue of inclusion into sharp relief in so far as specific cultural characteristics are concerned. This includes relations with 'country' in indigenous communities, as well as a range of practices that apply more generally to notions of home, sustainability and environment.

In Scotland, this played out in the grounded and vernacular practice of caring for the physical environment, which was directly attributable to the cultural heritage of some people on the Isle of Mull. An unsuccessful attempt to establish the village of Fionnphort as a Transition Town was less driven by an act of resistance on the part of residents, than it was bound to heritage and established ways of doing business. In that regard, pre-existing practices were valued above those that would have been imposed.

With regard to the Isle of Iona, I encountered an embedded characteristic that concerns the cultural history of place. As with other Hebridean Islands, the relationship between insiders and outsiders can be a vexed business, particularly in relation to reliance on tourism as a critical element of economic sustainability. In its playing out on Iona this manifests in a very clear delineation between those who claim heritage on the Island (insiders), and those 'incomers' (outsiders) who may be short-stay seasonal workers or new arrivals. In some cases, research participants registered their concerns here, particularly in relation to building community relationships. In that regard, the issue of heritage, whether perceived or actual, is an issue that goes to the heart of belonging and needs to be factored into both methodology and methods.

Conclusion

From Context to Paradox

The idea that communities of place can develop as durable sites of sustainability-in-practice contrasts sharply with the unifying precepts that have thus far steered international, social-environmental governance. This is largely because sustainability has been subject to significant transformations that have tended to move in lock step with escalating global threats to the stability of soil, waterways, air and finally, climate. More recently calibrated to balance environmental integrity and the imperative of (economic) development, sustainability has been reconfigured, to the degree that it has lost much of its original meaning.

In that regard, international accords bear testament to the fundamental paradox of mediating between environmental integrity on the one hand and the interests of corporate capital on the other. Absent any coherent reckoning with the grounded effects of degrading social-natural environments international governance has, by default, become a catalyst that has given rise to a deeper paradox. More specifically and in its playing out, the distantiated relations between international 'collectives' and local communities are no longer as removed from each other as they once were. In large part this arises because necessity has become a critical driver that invests sustainability with considerably more meaning at the community level than the international domain. This is particularly evident when we consider that *none* of the current environmental accords, charters or protocols take integrated, life-sustaining practices as a starting point in dealing with pervasive (global) environmental challenges. Indeed, these practices are not embedded precursors to any of the negotiated initiatives that have become so familiar in discourse and debate. Rather, the balancing act has progressively been crafted around (economic) development as an a priori condition of environmental brokerage³⁸⁶. And just as the international domain is not a generally successful site from which to co-ordinate 'sustainable development', neither is the nation state – at least, not yet. In every respect, international governance remains caught in the paradox

³⁸⁶ Sustainable development in its international construction illustrates the point. See: Redclift, M. (2005) 'Sustainable Development (1987-2005): The coming of age of an oxymoron', *Sustainable Development* 13: 212-27

of serving two opposing forces, as do the nations that constitute its membership.

A Re-reading of History

In responding to these overarching issues, relations of power are situated as integral features of environmental challenges that arise in series, over time. In relation to notions of 'development', this feature of environmental governance emerges through the ongoing presence and escalation of highly exploitative, hazardous and unregulated production processes. Indeed, the fact that the most hazardous are usually situated in developing countries obscures the continuity in their evolution. Far from being merely a 'remnant' of the industrial revolution, they remain as emblematic of development now as they were during the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

With regard to natural environments, the legacy effects of Enlightenment thinking is to be found in two distinct yet complementary features of development. In the first instance, the separations and fragmentations that characterised the human-nature binary established a mechanistic-instrumentalist hierarchy of power relations. Fashioned as nature-in-service, the exploitation and intensification with which production developed normalised risk as a feature of the 'improvements' carried by the Enlightenment. Enduring as a characteristic feature of production generally, those same risks have intensified, extending to hazard and degradation.³⁸⁷

A second, enduring feature of development extends to the exploitation of human beings, particularly in relation to labour processes that go largely unconstrained by any consistently applied governance arrangements. While much is made of the depredations of pre and post industrial England, contemporary contexts continue to exhibit these same conditions, though in quite distinct forms. Not only does the developed-developing binary establish new national sites within which that exploitation now takes place, the

³⁸⁷ See: Beck, U., (2000), "Risk Society Revisited: Theory, Politics, and Research Programmes", in Adam, B., Beck, U., van Loon, J. (eds.), *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues for Social Theory*, Sage, London pp. 211–229.; Mander, J. (1992) *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations*, The Sierra Club, San Francisco; Hills, B. (1989) *Blue Murder: Two thousand doomed to die - the shocking truth about Wittenoom's deadly dust*, Sun Books, South Melbourne

hierarchies that prevail extend to labour relations and abuse of children common in many developing countries. Irrespective of internationally established human rights, the continuing exploitation of human beings stands as an expression of power relations, then and now.³⁸⁸

Science, technology and dissociation

In their translation, these relations of power manifest most clearly in both science and technology, which are now threaded into the fabric of civil life. In a lecture delivered in 2011 Isabelle Stengers³⁸⁹ challenged the province of 'fast science'³⁹⁰ as an embedded feature of production processes generally. Characterised by specialisations that subvert the injunction to consider various and distributed effects of their labour, scientists are not the independent masters of their efforts. Rather, the vast majority are employed in service to specific technological-scientific imperatives that support corporate interests. Geared to profit, rather than well-reasoned applications that do not carry risk or threat, fast science enjoys protection and isolation from broader scrutiny. As she puts it: "The autonomy of fast science may well have protected the reliability of scientific claims, but (it) never ensured the reliability of a mode of development which we are now shamefully forced to recognize as having been...radically unsustainable...(S)cientific reliability is situated, bound to the constraints of its production."³⁹¹

The importance of this reading of science and technology to this work lies in the fragmentary forms that characterise its applications. In relation to sustaining biosphere and locale alike, the dissociative relations that arise between people and the multiple environments that they occupy have their genesis in in this fusion of (fast) science and its technological applications. As with the relation between head and hand, science and technology are

³⁸⁸ See: International Labour Organization (2005), "Child Labour in Africa", Child Labor, Paper 10. <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/child/10>; "Report on the Rapid Assessment Study on Child Labour in selected coffee and tea plantations in Ethiopia", Ethiopian Employer's Federation and International Labour Organization; Selcuk, F. (2005) 'Dressing the Wound: Organizing Informal Sector Workers', *Monthly Review*, May 2005, pp. 37-44; Quiroz, L. (2008) 'Child Labour in the Coffee Sector of Guatemala', *The IREWOC Research Project on the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Latin America*.

³⁸⁹ Stengers, I. (2011) "Another science is possible! A plea for slow science", Inaugural Lecture, Calewaert Leerstoel, University of Brussels

³⁹⁰ The allusion here is to 'fast food' and its deleterious effects.

³⁹¹ *ibid*, p. 9.

distributed according to the relations that sustain them, incorporated into a body that deploys them, and seldom restricted in their movement. Yet that said, and as with the paradox that dogs international environmental governance, so too does fast science find itself confronted with its opposite: slow science. In effect, slow science within Stengers' construction, is constituted by the capacity to think with and within, not apart and distanced from. Characteristically messy, it escapes the confines of 'objective categories' and occupies the worlds with which it is engaged.³⁹² In a process characterised as 'discovery', slow science is the articulating force that so often cleans up the mess of its 'fast' corollary. By way of example, the body of (slow) scientific research on climate change has confronted the complex web of interactive forces that fed degradation, not preservation. Characterised by the unending marketization of 'the new', unconstrained depletion of ozone, and concomitant impacts on oceans and air, the force of fast science (and its applications) is now being met *not* by those who created it, but rather, by those who stand *within* the mess it has created³⁹³. Paradoxically then, the objective-rational and instrumentalist predilections of the one must be met by the extended coherence of the other.

Returning to the locus of this work, an obvious questions arises: What are the implications of this exchange between sciences of a different hue for communities of place? Given that the locale that constitutes 'home' will sometimes stand as a productive site from which income will be derived, any on-going destabilisation of local sites through their contamination will be an ongoing feature of community life. Here, social-environmental risk behaviours driven by the convenience of 'fast' solutions to the profit imperative are more likely to arise where corporate interests are in play. The case of Miracle Rice³⁹⁴, cited earlier, exemplifies the point. More generally and in developed countries, case examples extend to food production, mining and resource development and power generation - all held in the thrall of 'fast' development.

³⁹² Stengers, I. (2011) "Another science is possible! A plea for slow science", Inaugral Lecture, Calewaert Leerstoel, University of Brussels, p.10

³⁹³ See: Rignot, E., Velicogna, I., van den Broeke, M.R., Monaghan, A. and Lenaerts, J. (2011) 'Acceleration of the contribution of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets to sea level rise', *Geophysical Research Letters*, vol. 38, pp. 1-5

³⁹⁴ Bell, M. (2004) *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology* (2nd ed.), Sage, London, pp.94-96

Development on a Flat Earth: The Case for Reverse Engineering

Throughout the unfolding of this thesis I have consistently cast development in the pejorative. In acknowledging that many benign benefits *are* attributable to advances in science and technology - or however else we may characterise development - they do not constitute general representations of the best that could have been crafted. The same might be said of international environmental governance. If it has achieved nothing else it has certainly drawn nation states to the table, and there is at least a level of environmental diplomacy about which some of the more regulatory functions of the UN can be navigated. Yet that said, *in neither case is it enough* to secure the relative stability and sustainability of the biosphere itself. If it were otherwise then ozone depletion and rising sea levels would have remained the stuff of science fiction.

In considering the deeper imperatives that have sent governance and development on a race to the bottom, I turn to the many and persistent exhortations to recalibrate the moral-ethical compass. From ecofeminists to ecologists, new social movements and farming communities, the need-turned-greed motif of corporate capital draws its fair share of commentary, rage and exposure³⁹⁵. Apart from anything else, we're now better informed than ever before about the perils of the 'next big thing'. We can claim and locate our own 'experts' within regional and local settings, and, we're harder to fool.

In fusing environmental governance to development in a more grounded manner, a more critical reappraisal of the current state of play becomes possible. In their unearthing the case of BD Sharma's address to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit³⁹⁶ resonates in the spheres of both governance and development.

³⁹⁵ Davison, A., (2004), 'Reinhabiting technology: ends in means and the practice of place', *Technology in Society*, 26: 85-97; Davison, A. (2010) 'Recovering Human Ground on the New Earth', *Wildlife Australia*, Autumn, pp. 40-41; Plumwood, V. (2003) 'The Fight for the Forests Revisited, paper delivered to Win, Lose or Draw: the Fight for the Forests?' A Symposium, Old Canberra House, Australian National University, 14 October 2003.

<http://cres.anu.edu.au/fffweb/plumwood1.pdf>;

Schoch, R. (2002) 'A conversation with Carolyn Merchant', *California Monthly*, vol.112, no.6, June (http://209.232.194.53/Alumni/Cal_Monthly/main.asp); Mathews, F. (2007) 'Without Animals Life Is Not Worth Living', *calpoly*, Issue 7, pp. 1-24

³⁹⁶ BD Sharma (1992) in Gottlieb, R. S. (Ed.) (1996) *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature*,

Born India in 1919, Sharma was a long time political activist and freedom fighter who laboured tirelessly and at considerable personal risk to assert the independence of his home state, Haryana. Writing from Madhya Pradesh on May 1st, 1992, he engaged 'the honourable members of the Earth Summit: Rio: Brazil' as one-time governor of the independent state, applauding the 'august assembly' for coming together to address the 'future viability and integrity of the Earth as a hospitable home of human and other forms of life.'³⁹⁷ Thereafter, his respectful reminder of the underlying impetus that drove the Summit lost its convivial tone:

You should know that in our villages we have stopped, totally, the commercial exploitation of our forests. The government of our country, of course, may not appreciate the spirit behind our decision. They have, in fact, taken it to be defiance of the law. For the forests formally belong to the state. We are, accordingly, treated as intruders in our own abodes where we have been living through the ages. Consequently, according to the law, we cannot even dig for roots and tubers, pluck fruits, or even breathe freely the nectar of the earth. We cannot pick bamboo to cover our huts, or cut a pole to mend our plough. "That will destroy the forests", they say. And when magnificent trees of all varieties are mercilessly felled and carted away, leaving the earth naked and bare, we are told that is scientific management. That such acts are performed in the service of the nation. The little sparrow and owl meanwhile desperately flutter about searching for a place to perch. But even the hollow trunks of dried trees have not been spared!³⁹⁸

The context established, Sharma asserts that:

'(T)he perception of national economy which today the state represents is not the perception of the people for whom forest, land and water together comprise a primary life-support system. The legal fiction of the state's suzerainty over natural resources was created during the colonial era and has been continued and even reinforced after independence, in the name of development. This is not acceptable to us...we are confident that this perception of ours is shared by the people similarly placed across the globe...'³⁹⁹

Environment, Routledge, New York, pp. 558-564

³⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.558

³⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.558

³⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.558

The punch-line, delivered unequivocally, quickly turns to the underlying issues that have infused *all* of the international summits, protocols and conventions since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit:

We therefore respectfully submit that the honourable representatives of governments at the Earth Summit are not competent to speak for the disinherited amongst us. Your perceptions and therefore your stand will be that of estate managers keen to exploit resources on the lines already set by the North. In the past this has invariably implied deprivation of the masses to the benefit of small elite groups. Frankly, we fear that even though the honourable representatives of Non-Government Organizations – notable exceptions apart – may differ in their views with the state, they are, by and large, bound to share such common basic frameworks as are necessary for their acceptance as partners in the negotiating process. It will not surprise us, therefore, if deliberations at the Summit turn out to be partial.⁴⁰⁰

To some Sharma's address might appear somewhat dated, yet it resonates well into a new millennium where small island nations prepare to move house. Forced from their habitats these local worlds and the various lives that they support are drowning under the surging tides of environmental degradation, its origins ever in 'development'. Pleading their case for coherence and co-ordination amongst the developed nations of a world order that still fails them, they echo much of Sharma's lament. Yet these newly tagged 'environmental refugees' constitute only one portion of the overarching story, one in which the demonstrable losses will (apparently) only register when they roll onto the shores of the decision-makers.

Thus far crafted on a flat Earth, the moral-ethical compass of development operates with no cardinal point; no register from which to calculate one position in relation to another. All we know is that the edge constitutes a tipping point; once breached there is no way back. But as needs must, the flat earth brand does actually take everything to the edge. It's easy enough to navigate; straight lines all the way. And where risk prevails, well, throw something close to the edge, just to check; something less valued than the captains and crews. Animals, 'surplus humanity', a forest...then wait and see if we really did breach the limits of flat-land.

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.558

As to the heretics who would render Earth a round, dynamic and fully alive place, well, they'll be left to navigate the tensions that accompany complexity. It will take vigilance, balance, responsiveness, knowledge of other. No mean feat. But, the compass works here. It can't help itself. Direction can be charted. And while we can't direct the wind, we can adjust the sails.

In meeting the present field of possibilities that springs from these contrasting positions, perhaps a way forward is to be found in recalibrating the ways in which governance meets development. Which brings me to the business of reverse engineering. If we choose to accept that communities of place register the environmental impacts of development at its worst, and if we extend the reach of those impacts to regions, as with Sharma's case, then why is it not feasible to undertake environmental governance at the regional level? If the 'international community' is so collectively committed to every accord, charter and protocol, to say nothing of emission reduction targets, then why not do some actual, down-on-the-ground targeting? What not consign responsibility for the realization of a whole host of 'controls' to those liberal democracies that so pride themselves on the status of being 'developed'? More to the point, why not share the gains that may arise from a recalibrated compass that runs true on a round Earth. Inevitably, the turn to regions and communities of place presents as a site from which a beginning may be situated. After all, there is enough evidence to indicate that the state has already been bypassed in a bid to reclaim coherence. And as to the transitional planning that will be essential to this recovery, it will mean moving out - out of flat earth and onto the common ground of a more rounded coherence.

Intending Community

The enactment of sustainability that informed this work took many forms from which I drew no definitive conclusions. Instead, I extend the information that flowed from the research and present what might best be considered informed speculations about the relative importance of communities as durable sites of sustainability in practice.

Sustainability: Local Emergence

The emergence of communities as sites of sustainable practice is not, and probably never will be, a uniform process, particularly because of the variations in communities themselves. Certainly, in the case of Australia, it has become increasingly evident that the *stimulus* of international and national failures is leading a new development, one in which the state is being progressively bypassed in favour of localised, collective action. In some towns, villages and suburbs, the range of sustainability practices extends to community-owned renewable power generation, food cultivation and sharing, restoration of habitat, communal gardening, recycling and repair initiatives and so on, and while there is occasionally some local government sponsorship, in the main, federal, state and territory governments remain distanced and disengaged. Some social-environmental movements play their part in mobilising publics, yet it is more generally the case that communities are enacting their own versions of sustainability in a more organic fashion.

An equally important and complimentary register of this development arises in litigation against both government and corporate interests that compromise the integrity of localities. Exemplifying the way in which this plays out is a recent class action instigated by residents of Portsea. A small town on the eastern side of Port Phillip Bay, the shoreline of Portsea was inundated and then swept away shortly after deep-dredging commenced. Running counter to advice from the then state government's Department of Sustainability and Environment the legacy prevails, to the degree that much of the Bay has been significantly destabilised through contamination, increases to rates and volume of water flow, shoreline erosion and tidal encroachment. While Portsea constitutes one of many examples that signal the reclamation of social-environmental justice, it must be acknowledged that the impacts of

equally unsound developmental initiatives in regional and remote areas, particularly in developing countries, will not enjoy the same degree of collective action or support in the short term. Despite this, the now well established precedent of communities as counterforce stands in cautious testament to a new potential.

Interpretation, Iteration and Meaning

In moving closer to local life I have engaged with a re-meeting of many orthodoxies. My purpose here was not to dispatch the value or merit of conventional approaches, neither was it to develop a critique. It was to re-engage with sustainability, not as an 'overworked and tired' motif, but through its place in common usage. While I do support much of the critical commentary that unpacks the limits of such a construction, it does nonetheless remain as part of the discursive landscape. Broadly heard and variously understood, the limits of its applications have less to do with its international status and their evident deficiencies, and more to do with its iterations, interpretations and applications. Put bluntly, communities and regions, wherever they lie, have seldom informed the development of any aspect of sustainability and its global status. Less still have they been called upon to register any of the foundational precepts upon which it might be activated. To the detriment of a more coherent and informed approach, this oversight ignores the very real gains made by communities of place as they move closer to the realities with which they must live. Invested with meaning that evolves from various and diverse engagements with place, these activities constitute an informed response to the needs of human and other. In many cases, residents carry with them a diverse range of expertise that extends to environmental science, engineering, community development and planning, as well as those who contribute to the fabric of local life through wisdom traditions, relationship building and social support.

Sustainability and the limits of transferability

Accounting for variations in culture, social organization, political life and relations of power, as well as distinct differences in natural and built environments, the business of sustaining any discrete 'world' will often be subject to its specific attributes. In effect, not all sustainability practices will be transferable across nations, regions or even localities. Renewable power generation serves as a case in point. In some parts of the northern hemisphere daylight fades early during the winter months. The capture of solar energy is thereby not a continuously viable option. By contrast, many countries in the southern hemisphere enjoy abundant exposure to sunlight. In Australia this is particularly so.

Where once the will to actually identify and calibrate ecological and human diversity might have reinvigorated global environmental governance, it now rests with communities and researchers to assert the importance of this feature of sustainability. Clearly, this supports the development of a far broader knowledge base than that relied upon by the international domain within which environmental degradation has thus far been managed. By implication, alternatives that fit the sites for which they are intended need to be fostered in a more informed and co-ordinated fashion. That said, there will be some baseline precepts that can and should be carried across all national, regional and local sites. In particular, the preservation of soil, water and air quality, and the ecosystemic relations between human and other species, along with waste management practices that do not impact human and other environments.

Co-constructed Worlds: Agency and Agents

In developing a conceptual framework that accounted for the co-constructed nature of worlds large and small, my purpose was to address the need for inclusiveness. It was also to open a modest primary research process to the possibilities that come with discovery. What we know about the international domain is legion. By contrast, what we don't know about its discrete places and spaces is equally compelling in its scope. As a consequence, any representation of communities of place needs to accommodate all elements and actors. An overworked focus on the human comes at the detriment of a

broadened awareness, where we run the risk of missing the contingent, uncertain elements of life and living. To assert human agency as an a priori condition of sustainability avoids the obvious “yes, but what about” the presence of non-human agents that actually do assert their viable continuity. Topographies, geologies, waterways and seas – these are the not-dead, not-inanimate elements that actually *situate* all species, serving to sustain them on the one hand, sometimes destabilising them on the other.

Recognition and Inclusion: the Nature of Co-creative Processes

In choosing to adopt a more informal approach to communities of place I acknowledge that detachment and distance have their place, just not in the context of unearthing the more personal-subjective meaning attributed to sustainability and its various enactments. Instead, the impetus to develop a fuller awareness of people, places and processes demanded that this research operate as co-creative practice. Accordingly, sustainability was not defined or prescribed. As a consequence, the flow of meetings, conversational exchanges and interviews elicited far more than would have been the case had I chosen instead to restrict the research through controlled processes across all sites.

As to the actual value of those personal versions of sustainability. My contention is that because so little is known or understood about the more grounded expression of both word and practice, some space needed to be created within which that void could be filled, however partially. Given that local communities the world over will be left to deal with the impost of degrading environments, this had the potential to draw out what was being learned across multiple sites. While the scope and scale of this research was limited, the depth of its explorations enabled a fuller reading of sustainability in practice.

Space, Place, Home

To render community in its wholeness notions of space and place are vital inclusions that account for the extended character and multiple readings of home. From time to time, individual participants spoke about these features of community life. Various and nuanced meanings slowly found a niche and just as I attempted to assert their presence so I turned to those open spaces and places that constituted home for the other-than-human.

As to some of the commentary on space and place that has so occupied theorists and researchers, I turn Michel de Certeau⁴⁰¹. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* place accommodates elements that are distributed in relationships of co-existence. Place configures the position of things; it 'implies an indication of stability'. By contrast, 'space is composed of intersections of mobile elements...actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it'; it has none of the stability of place.⁴⁰² Notional, ideational and substantive, space occupies multiple sites. Story, imagination and the act of walking are all constituted in space formed by the phenomena that arise within it.

And the value of considering these nuanced aspects of community life? It rests with knowledge, intuitions, ideas, beliefs and values. The personal, inner domain – that space - and the variously populated outer world, stand in dynamic relation to each other. From the creative-imaginal to the spiritual, as well as the feared and valued, space is full of form and content. In its playing out it interacts with place.

By default or design, the turn to sustainability at the local level is driven by connection with it – whether on an island, a regional village or a suburb. The spaces and places that constitute home are as much a function of the interiority of personal lives, as its outer expression. The capacity to endure, draw sustenance and sustain the multiple worlds we occupy rests on the will to carry the personal into the collective that constitutes community in its fullness.

⁴⁰¹ de Certeau, M. (1988) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA

⁴⁰² *ibid.*, p.117

The Communography: Prospects for Development

In establishing a way to navigate research into the sustainability of communities of place the communographic approach as I applied it owes much to the scholars on whose work I drew. In particular, the co-constructivist framing evolved from an extensive engagement with Stengers⁴⁰³, Forsyth⁴⁰⁴ and Irwin⁴⁰⁵. In many respects, the communography carries some of the best that other approaches offer, not least, some elements of reflexive ethnography. Yet that said, I believe that it extends them because of the inclusion of all elements of place. In addition, the impetus to develop a communographic approach stems from an acknowledged need to accurately name what we undertake when we say we are *doing* social research. Noted earlier, the political-ontological dimension of our efforts warrants more attention than it often receives⁴⁰⁶. In that respect, the designation 'ethnographic' is, in itself, not sufficient however much it may be qualified by reflexivity. Apart from that, naming that accurately reflects and expresses what is being researched is something that I support as a feature of transparency and ethical practice.

In asserting the equivalence of human-other relations that a co-constructivist approach demands a less explicit challenge had to be met. That is, how to engage with and represent environs, species and topographies in ways that remained unified with the human? The approach I took was to develop a digital artefact that constitutes a complimentary text. In so far as the character of the artefact is concerned, rather than simply deploying photographic stills of 'the landscape' or 'the scene' and adding to it 'noiseworks' that flowed from it, I attempted to stand-in-each-moment with where I was and what I was seeing, hearing and experiencing. By stilling the image I hoped to give primacy to sound; by repositioning sound, I hoped to reconstitute image. In

⁴⁰³ Stengers, I. (2008) 'A Constructivist Reading of Process and Reality', *Theory, Culture, Society*, Vol. 25(4): 91-110; Stengers, I. (2005) 'An ecology of practices', *Cultural Studies Review*, Vol.11 (1): 183-196

⁴⁰⁴ Forsyth, T. in Stainer, A. and Lopez, G. (eds.) (2001) *After postmodernism: critical realism?* Athlone Press, London, pp. 146-154

⁴⁰⁵ Irwin, A (2001) 'Society, Nature, Knowledge: Co-constructing the Social and the Natural', in *Sociology and the Environment: A Critical Introduction to Society, Nature and Knowledge*, Chapter 7, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 161-187

⁴⁰⁶ Law, J. & Urry, J. (2004) 'Enacting the Social', *Economy and Society*, 33.

many respects my aim was to develop a sensory dialectic that might enable a quite different reading of what sustainability means, of how it performs and of the actors who become its articulating force.

While the Evaluation of Research Elements and Methods, along with an account of the Emergent Themes, provide an indication of the relative value of the communography as it applied to this primary research process, some examination of the potential to apply it more broadly was a consideration that I implicitly carried into the process. In large part this arose because of my own concern about the local-global divide with regard to the more pressing considerations that apply to sustainability.

More specifically, if we accept that communities of place are impacted by pervasive social and environmental challenges, then they surely warrant more consideration than they currently receive in the resolution of those challenges. In relation to the place and role of social research here, I identify a need to situate qualitative research of the type undertaken in the communography, beside, not apart from, quantitative research. In particular, I consider that population-based research and its potential relation to qualitative research of this kind may well rest with its 'fit' in a more comprehensive approach to sustainability-in practice.

In considering the potential of a more extended, interdisciplinary approach of this type, I look to Local Government Areas (LGA's) as prospective sites within which such an approach could be applied. With scientific and population data readily available⁴⁰⁷, and with towns, villages and suburbs already designated as part of individual LGA's, the prospects for developing an evidence-based platform for a range of community initiatives appear quite sound. In my own professional experience⁴⁰⁸, this is done from time to time in relation to some structural and social challenges, far less so in relation to

⁴⁰⁷ Census Data are available by Local Government Area from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

⁴⁰⁸ This extends to work in national population-based (quantitative) research, and localised, regional research. Over a period of about thirty years I worked for government and non-government agencies in addressing structural and regional challenges in health, housing and a range of social challenges. While quantitative research was more usually deployed here, there were occasions when a more qualitative approach was incorporated to ensure that the more nuanced features of these challenges did not escape 'discovery' or inclusion in broader research projects.

sustainability-in-practice. As to the will of local governments to take initiatives of this kind, I consider that in the case of Australia, it is a far stronger prospect than either state or federal government engagement, particularly because of proximity to the issues alluded to here. With that in mind an opportunity could be created for some local municipalities to take leadership roles.

In relation to the specific manner in which a research-driven project of this kind could be applied, two potential benefits emerge. Firstly, because more depth is drawn from qualitative research, outcomes can be used to inform the ways in which broader local initiatives can be crafted. That is, in informing the range of questions about local sustainability and assessing pre-existing initiatives. Rather than imposing top-down strategies imported from external authorities or movements, the prospects for inclusive, context-specific activities arises. Secondly, and at the LGA level, this enables a more coherent approach to the business of sustaining communities, one that can be evaluated through its triangulation with broader statistical data. The advantage of this approach is that it can be subjected to cross-tabulation with a range of population characteristics in order to assess change over time. For example, age, gender, income distribution, cultural heritage, and other characteristics can be factored into any planning and development. Importantly, while population and scientific data can provide an array of reliable information about social and environmental characteristics, they more usually fall short in accounting for the underlying impetus for engagement in, or knowledge of, the forces that challenge the sustainability of local, regional and global life. To generate a synthesis that combines both the quantitative and qualitative dimension of research in this area is a challenge that is, in my view, worth addressing. Indeed, it is one that is already finding some traction in Europe and the US.

In their extensive coverage of 'small town sustainability', Meyer and Knox⁴⁰⁹ recalibrate the place of the locale, noting that while 'small towns account for a significant fraction of the total population in many regions... there has been

⁴⁰⁹ Heike Mayer & Paul Knox (2010), "Small-Town Sustainability: Prospects in the Second Modernity", *European Planning Studies*, 18:10, pp. 1545-1565

a relative lack of research into small towns, with researchers' attention being drawn more to the effects of globalization and technological change on large cities and city regions'⁴¹⁰. Following an examination of Beck's 'first and second modernity', they go on to isolate the critical features of contemporary social, political and economic life that have fractured the relations between people, place and environments:

Together with larger towns and cities, small towns now face the challenge of a "second modernity", an emergent era of "reflexive modernization", this time at the global scale and involving cosmopolitanism, transnationalism and supra-nationalism that are at odds with the top-down managed capitalism and planned modernization of the first modernity ...⁴¹¹

Notwithstanding the impacts of these features of contemporary life, the authors note the counterforce that has arisen. Dealing with the need to secure a more coherent approach they pursue some of the more recent initiatives that locate the locale as central, rather than marginal, to the project of sustainability:

In attempts to recapture some control over the scale of the new economic logic and its social, cultural and environmental implications, national governments have become increasingly collaborative, supranational entities have emerged, many institutions have extended their focus from a national to an international frame of reference *and many local and regional organizations have become involved in cross-border collaborative networks of one sort or another*. An increasing public awareness of the complex, multi-scalar interdependence that characterizes the second modernity (underscored by the consequences of global warming, by energy costs, by food scares and food shortages and by the 2008 global financial "meltdown") has contributed to new sensibilities.⁴¹² [Emphasis added]

In accounting for the specific and multiple forms of these transformations the authors review a series of case studies in Europe. As they note, the emergence of slow food movements that rely on local produce, coupled with *eco*-municipalities in Sweden and economic gardening in the US all combine to signal a local-regional level of transformation that addresses the very issues that go to the heart of community sustainability. Notable among them is Sweden's *municipal level* of engagement with ecological sustainability.

⁴¹⁰ op. cit., p. 1545

⁴¹¹ op. cit., p. 1546

⁴¹² op. cit., p. 1545

Created in 1995, the umbrella organization SEkom⁴¹³ developed an environmental indicator system that towns can use to monitor progress towards sustainability. These indicators include the monitoring of:

- CO₂ emission from fossil fuel (tons per resident);
- Quantity of dangerous waste from households (kg per resident);
- Percentage of arable land with ecologically grown crops;
- Percentage of environmentally approved forestry (certified by the Forest Stewardship Council or the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification);
- Percentage of protected environments (nature reserves);
- Collection of household waste for recycling (responsibility of manufacturer; kg per resident);
- Total amount of household waste (excluding responsibility of manufacturer; kg per resident);
- Heavy metals in drainage sludge (mg per kg TS);
- Percentage of renewable and recycled energy in municipal premises;
- Transportation energy for business trips by car (tons per employee) and CO₂ emissions from business trips by car (tons per employee);
- Purchase of organic provisions within the municipal organization (percentage of the cost) and
- Percentage environmentally approved schools and day-care centres (certified systems such as Green Schools, Schools for Sustainable Development, ISO 14001, EMAS)⁴¹⁴

Far from being relegated to the status of insignificant local initiatives, these emerging responses show considerable promise in advancing a closer alignment between sustainability theorized, and sustainability-in-practice. Importantly, they also hold some prospect of infusing national and international environmental brokerage. To date the distribution of these endeavours is uneven and specific, yet that is perhaps one of the strengths of a more 'organic', locality-based response to social and environmental challenges that now register at a global level.

In the context of this work, a more intimate, sensory engagement with communities of place unearthed the deeper held meanings that are carried into various expressions of sustainability-in-practice. In sharing the journey through both text and artefact, the opportunity now presents to enter into a broader exchange beyond the boundaries of the original research. Whatever from that exchange may take, it will continue to include the very people and places that centre its expression.

⁴¹³ Sveriges Ekokommuner

⁴¹⁴ op. cit., p. 1557

Afterword: The Last Word

From the first to the last, *Intending Community* was a process that steered me into the lifeworlds of space, place and home. Human and not-human; environments built and natural. Led by Lionel and Dot, the tone was set. They took their respective places in the ordinary way of people who find meaning in the worlds they occupy. The one I encountered through the simple act of walking; the other, by flying into a hemisphere I had yet to encounter.

And so, as the journey draws to a close, the last word doesn't feel like it's mine to claim. If Lionel and Dot can contribute so much to an understanding of what it takes to sustain their worlds, then so too the creative-imaginal, political and spiritual dimensions of life so often pushed to the margins of scholarship. Moving to the human-ecological, biographical and fictional, that 'last word' is then passed to people who open a reading of community in ways that conventional research so often avoids.

The emphases of these three works differ in many respects, yet there is an underlying unity that rests with the spiritual, historical, cultural and political dimensions of social life. In each case, individual, local voices lead adventures in liberation; in each case, the centrality of human relationships is crafted within and around physical environments. For all three community is the locus of story lines, activism and change. Importantly, these diverse contributions and insights, both factual and fictional, locate their protagonists within the social-material milieu that constitutes home. In the process they each speak to the forces that sustain us and the worlds we value.

*Soil and Soul*⁴¹⁵

For Alastair McIntosh, the value embedded in the human ecology of a small Scottish island fires a political struggle to wrest home from the vagaries of social, cultural and economic colonization. Infused with stories of land and sea, of struggle and cultural history, *Soil and Soul* is personal, political and communal. Set on the isles of the Outer Hebrides, the legacy of feudal relations is here writ large. Lairds, crofters and the relations that underscore land tenure are mediated not by the remnant past, but by its contemporary expression. Crafted in two parts, McIntosh initially draws us down and into life on the isle of Lewis. Fifty miles from the Scottish mainland, his growing up starts here. Conservative at its heart, this is a community where cultural hierarchies that develop around land ownership define relations.

In the 1960's home is a croft, childhood lived in direct relation to physical environments. By the 70's transformations herald disruptions. Small local fishing fleets that had endured because of their balanced relations with the environment find themselves displaced as the Highlands and Islands Development Board seeds a new initiative. The introduction of a capital grants scheme to upgrade the fishing fleet is a double-edged sword. The 'new' duly deployed, steel trawlers, replete with technologies, displace the old. At the time 'Britain was entering the European Common Fisheries Policy' and boats could come from any member country of the then Common Market. Inevitably, the demise of fish stocks, livelihood and ecosystem integrity followed. In the process, '...the old skills (and) the time inculcated sense of responsibility towards place, were losing sway. Boats were increasingly crewed by relatively inexperienced young men who took their bearings not from tradition, but from technology.'⁴¹⁶

As he grows, McIntosh is employed as a ghillie⁴¹⁷ during the summer months, spending much of his time in service to lairds and their guests on sporting estates. Relations are convivial and stories abound. Admirals, Generals and Colonels mix it up with diamond merchants and their ilk.

⁴¹⁵ McIntosh, A. (2004) *Soil And Soul: People Versus Corporate Power*, Arum Press, London

⁴¹⁶ McIntosh, A. (2004) *Soil And Soul: People Versus Corporate Power*, Arum Press, London, p.37

⁴¹⁷ Servant, usually in relation to outdoor service.

In its telling this is way of life and living where history is not filtered out. Here and there Celtic ecology rises and falls like the waves, yet the encounter with the 'cold and religious' is not far off. As he puts it, 'I grew up in a conservative, fundamentalist culture. In both primary and secondary school we had to learn whole chapters of the Bible by heart', with many of the teachers 'halfway between minister and the policeman'.⁴¹⁸ But that said there are the friends and cohorts who bring balance to the 'creed of Scots Presbyterianism'. Stories, folklore and myth play their part and he captures the complexity of this out-of-the-way island by welding biographical detail to the underlying forces that draw people into each other's lives.

In the unfolding of the place and its people McIntosh moves us toward greater realizations about the nature of human relationships; of their strange dynamic. Not so much reflective as reflexive, he locates his own awareness:

Looking back, the guests on our Hebridean sporting estates demonstrated it all so very well. Ordinary, otherwise nice people get carried along in mindsets that are bigger than they are. One a one-to-one basis, a profound humanity was very often evident. But set in the wider frameworks of military, corporate, political and even religious power, it was equally evident that underneath the ermine, chequebook and charm lay a basic willingness...to use the most awesome violence to maintain privilege and keep control.⁴¹⁹

Whether through militarisation and war, or the colonisation of lands old and new, the lessons carried through these formative years resonated well into adulthood and lead straight to the nub of it all.

It's autumn 1990 and McIntosh is by now teaching at Edinburgh University's Centre for Human Ecology. Into his office walks Tom Forsyth, a crofter from the West Highland community of Scoraig. As the meeting between them unfolds, so too the story. At its most distilled, there is a move afoot to establish a Trust for the Isle of Eigg community. The purpose - to buy back the island from the then owner and landlord, Keith Schellenberg. Feudal tenure still holds here and everyone, save Schellenberg himself, is at the mercy of those medieval relations. Forsyth's request is plain enough.

Will McIntosh help? He will and he does.

⁴¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 47

⁴¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 98

Through the morass of personal, communal, corporate and legal challenges, the Trust gets up and Schellenberg reaps the seeds of his own dissonant relations with life as he is finally bought out. The Isle of Eigg Trust now holds the land and as the community is liberated from feudal tenure life begins anew.

How long did it take?

Seven years.

But...that's not the end of it.

Along the way another challenge rears its head. It's June 1991 and McIntosh, along with staff of the Centre for Human Ecology, hosts yet another visitor. This time, Ian Wilson, a Scottish businessman who has procured the mineral rights to turn Mount Roineabhal, on the Isle of Harris, into a superquarry. Looking for support and pitched as 'sustainable development', Wilson wants the imprimatur of the Centre – after all, 'sustainable' sells; good for business.

And so it's game on and the process that unfolds will navigate the same rough seas of political, economic, ecological, spiritual and cultural forces. There will be support from beyond as a Mi'kmaq leader, Sulian Stone Eagle, flies in. The experience of fusing indigenous spirituality with connection to the land in the first nation territories of Canada will help. A public inquiry will be called. Media coverage will extend well beyond the Highlands and Islands ...and on and on it goes. The superquarry will eventually be approved under the terms of the inquiry. But it's not over yet.

In November 2000 the convoluted battle draws to a close as the Scottish Government refuses to grant planning permission for the superquarry to go ahead.

Who wins?

Mount Roineabhal.

Infused with trials and the gains that come from meeting them head-on, *Soil and Soul* is precisely what its title evokes – a unified rendering of both. To know community, to live in it and with it. To know its relation and value to a broader world. All these are what it is to live out the relationship between people, place and home.

*Life as we have known it: by Co-operative Working Women*⁴²⁰

Set in the nineteenth century, this collection of memoirs bears testament to the critical importance of communal engagement at times of hardship and social transformation. Edited by Margaret Llewelyn Davies, *Life as We Have Known It* is the story of the Women's Co-operative Guild, founded in 1882 by Mrs. Acland and Mrs. Lawrenson. In declaring its driving force, Llewelyn Davis asserts that:

The Movement shows in practice that there is nothing visionary or impossible in the aspirations of those who desire to see the Community in control, instead of the Capitalists. Under the Co-operative system, no individuals can make fortunes, Co-operators evidently believing, like the old writer, that "money is like muck, no good unless it is spread." No "profits" are made; the surplus, inseparable from trading, is shared among the purchasers, according to the amount each spends. Capital becomes the tool of labour, and not its master.⁴²¹

For its time, the Guild was proactive and left leaning, the co-operatives made up of ordinary, working class members who 'own the shops where they buy, supply their own capital (on which a fixed interest is paid), and manage their businesses through elected committees and member's meetings...'⁴²²

During the 1930's there were over 1,000 societies and some 6,000,000 members throughout England and Scotland, constituting one of the largest trading and manufacturing concerns in Great Britain. Local societies also federated into the Co-operative Union for educational, legal and propagandist purposes, with the Movement taking an active part in the International Co-operative Alliance that operated across some 34 countries.⁴²³

Steered by the will to democratic co-operation the guildswomen established the notion of a 'marketing basket' based on their own, day-to-day needs. Buying bread and butter on a revolutionary basis leads to a reckoning with "The Family Wash", where the more usual riverside washing of clothes is reconfigured through the establishment of co-operative washhouses.⁴²⁴

⁴²⁰ Llewelyn Davies, M. (ed.) (1977), *Life as we have known it: by Co-operative Working Women*, Virago, London

⁴²¹ *ibid.*, p. xii

⁴²² *ibid.*, p. xii

⁴²³ *ibid.*, p. xii

⁴²⁴ *ibid.*, p. xv

In their all too brief memoirs, six women share the vagaries of life in nineteenth century Britain. What they carry in common is recounted through stories that register depredations and struggles; overcrowding, poverty and lack are embedded features of local life. Delivered in the ordinary manner of those accustomed to the ever present reality of death, loss, hunger and highly exploitative labour relations, many enter the world of work in childhood. But this confrontation with life's hard edge serves as catalyst and the politics of the personal becomes an outgrowth of struggle.

Educating themselves and each other, they sue for change, ultimately finding their collective voice in an environment where all comfort had hitherto been cold. With echoes that reverberate well into the current re-colonization of vulnerable populations, the voices that permeate this book speak to the issues of social and personal justice, learning and growth, and the value of community-based activism that springs from shared visions, robust relationships and mutual respect.

For Mrs. Layton, born in 1855, childhood in Bethnal Green (then a suburb of London) is characterised by 'dark rooms' and overcrowding. At the time of her birth she was the seventh child in the family, born to a mother that would produce another seven. At ten she enters domestic service, her wages 'one shilling and sixpence a week, and my tea...I got to work at eight in the morning and left at eight at night, with the exception of two nights a week when I left at seven o'clock to attend a night school, one of a number started by Lord Shaftesbury, called Ragged Schools.⁴²⁵

In 1882 she marries and a year later has a child. Life retains much of the character and rhythm of her formative years until her husband joins a Trades Union and a local co-operative society establishes itself. Joining, she is soon exposed to the value co-operation and ultimately becomes a midwife.

⁴²⁵ Llewelyn Davies, M. (ed.) (1977) *Life as we have known it: by Co-operative Working Women*, Virago, London, p.20

Reflecting, she notes:

I learnt in the Guild that Education was to be the workers' best weapon, and I determined if it were to be at all possible my son should have as good an education as I could give him. From a shy nervous woman, the Guild made me a fighter. I was always willing to go on a deputation if there was a wrong to be righted, or for any good cause, local or national.

Three years after the end of WWI, Mrs. Layton is Vice President of the Guild. In the intervening years she has earned a modest amount through 'co-operation' and extended her education. In 1930 she has an allotment, where food is grown and company shared:

I go there all day on a Sunday, and am sure there is as much spiritual feeling going along a ditch as there is in hearing a sermon...I now have my old age pension and have given up my work as a midwife. With my pension and a little money I have saved...I live very comfortably, and thank God that I became a Guild member for more reasons than I can explain.⁴²⁶

Emblematic of the voices that follow, individual memoirs chart the same line. There is Mrs. Wrigley, born at Cefn Mawr in 1858. By the age of nine she is 'servant of all work' at an estate in Stockport. Unable to read or write she can't let her parents know where she is bound as she is moved on to Owestry. By 1894 she is married with three sons, two to follow. Hardship and constant moving to find work ultimately lead to the Guild and things begin to change. As political awareness lights up the world she joins 'the Suffrage', in recognition that one must join in and fight to 'relieve the suffering of others'.⁴²⁷

In the concluding sequence, each of the contributors is asked to set out the readings that influenced them along the way. Not surprisingly, it is to Dickens, Hardy, George Eliot and Jane Austen that they turn, yet the list extends far beyond them. From tracts on Co-operation to Socialism, Poetry and 'General Education' the range and depth says something about the ways in which awareness was fed by both creative-imaginal and conventional works. In the process, we are met with a fusion of ideals, ideas and activism, all arising on common ground. And while we may consign these works to the past, their place in the present registers through the value of co-operation and activism as critical means directed toward inclusive ends.

⁴²⁶ *ibid.*, p.55

⁴²⁷ *ibid.*, p.65

*Housekeeping*⁴²⁸

Our understanding of the world is fragmentary, and we are extremely prone to overstate and over-interpret it. The sense of mystery may itself be the great missing value. By that I don't mean a conjured mystery but an intrinsic one, the kind that comes with a good long look at things, and people, as they are.⁴²⁹

In a work that resists categorization, Robinson crafts a multi-generational engagement with uncertainty. Through the narrative voice of Ruth, life in Fingerbone, a small Idaho town, begins when she and sister Lucille are dropped at the stoop of their grandmother's home by a mother who will never return. They are at the time, young, primary school age.

My name is Ruth. I grew up with my younger sister Lucille, under the care of my grandmother, Mrs. Sylvia Foster, and when she died, of her sisters-in-law, Misses Lily and Nona Foster, and when they fled, of her daughter, Mrs. Sylvia Fisher.⁴³⁰

Backgrounding the story, we learn that Ruth's grandfather lived on the plains in the Midwest in a 'house dug out of the ground, with windows just at earth level and just at eye level, so that from without, the house was a mere mound, no more a human stronghold than a grave, and from within, the perfect horizontality of the world in that place foreshortened the view so severely that the horizon seemed to circumscribe the sod house and nothing more'.⁴³¹

Engaged by all that home was not, Grandfather, then a young man, reads and dreams of mountains. Setting out one Spring day to find the world of his imagining, he travels by train into Fingerbone. Framed by mountains, lake and wilderness, his journey into a new life begins.

Finding work on the railway he moves up and into the role of stationmaster until the fateful day of his demise. It's ten years on when, returning from a trip to Spokane, the train on which he is travelling plunges from the Fingerbone bridge into the lake below, never to surface. He leaves behind his wife, Sylvia, along with their three daughters – Molly, Helen and Sylvie.

⁴²⁸ Robinson, M. (1980), *Housekeeping*, Picador, New York

⁴²⁹ Painter, R.M. (2009) 'Further Thoughts on A Prodigal Son Who Cannot Come Home, on Loneliness and Grace: An Interview with Marilynne Robinson', *Christianity and Literature*, Vol. 58, No. 3, p. 488

⁴³⁰ Robinson, M. (1980), *Housekeeping*, Picador, New York, p.3

⁴³¹ *ibid.*, p.3

Time passes and the three daughters each leave the home of their widowed mother in their turn. Molly heads for China, to work as a missionary. Helen leaves to marry and Sylvie, the youngest, leaves one day to visit Helen and doesn't come back.

Eventually Helen returns to her mother's house in Fingerbone, accompanied by her young daughters, Ruth and Lucille. Dropped off, they are told to wait as Helen drives away. Her destination? A cliff from which she will plunge car and self. Her destination: the depths of a lake that had years earlier claimed her father.

As a consequence of their mother's departure Ruth and Lucille are raised by their widowed grandmother until her death. Thereafter, two elderly sisters-in-law take up the call. Unable to cope they search out Sylvie Fisher, the girls' married aunt. Eventually Sylvie is found and returns to care for her nieces.

After long years spent as a transient, housekeeping is an unfamiliar business to which Sylvie does not adapt. Yet she will not leave her two charges to a fate they already know so well. She stays, but in her staying draws uncertainty into their lives. The constant movement of her past, and the call of a world beyond a house send Sylvie on a meandering trail into the wildish nature of Fingerbone. Drawn to both lake and mountains, her wandering ways get an airing. She sits in the dark at night, meanders through the hills and lakeshore during daylight hours. With stories of fellow travellers, she flows through her days barely anchored to the routines of life. The girls get fed, walked with and talked to, sometimes sitting in the silent moments of Sylvie's reveries.

Uncertainty pervades every moment and Sylvie occasionally vanishes without a trace, tracking through woods, rowing across the lake in a 'borrowed' boat. Time registers through passing trains and their schedules, with no prospect of a daily routine for Ruth and Lucille. Eventually, the inevitable happens and the girls, both unsure of their place in the town, start truanting. The lake draws them down to its shoreline and days are spent contemplating the consequences of their absence from school.

Lucille, the more confident of the two, looks for new friends; for a place to fit. By contrast, Ruth shrinks from the social, absorbing by osmosis Sylvie's way of being in the world. Eventually, the townsfolk set to worrying about the young girls. Watching them grow without direction, routine or maternalism in its more conventional form, their slow but kindly encroachment takes effect. Lucille moves in with her Home Economics teacher and gets some resolution to the uncertainties that characterised life in Sylvie's care. But the move heightens local concern for Ruth and the women of the town, along with the local sheriff, intervene.

Faced with the impending removal of Ruth from her care Sylvie asserts her familial loyalty, declaring that '...(F)amilies should stay together. They should. There is no other help. Ruthie and I have trouble enough with the ones we've lost already.'⁴³² But the writing's on the wall and desperate times require desperate measures. Scheming their way to freedom Sylvie and Ruth resolve to set fire to the house, deliberately confecting their own demise. With a plan that involves a nocturnal escape across the Fingerbone bridge they will hit the road.

As it plays out their efforts works in ways unintended. The house fails to burn, but dogs are deployed. Tracking their escape to a certain point along the bridge, the trail is lost and everyone assumes that they have plunged to the icy depths of the lake, as others before them, and the matter rests there. Liberated, they assume a life of constant movement. From here to there they travel by train, securing short-term jobs along the way.

In what is no small irony, *Housekeeping* is the perfect storm in which life-structures fall apart. Archetypal in character, it journeys in and out of the hearts, minds and environments of its protagonists. A work of interiority, there is no housekeeping here. Escaping the strictures of a normal life, Ruth and Sylvie's attempts to destroy the external structure of a house symbolises an act of liberation, one that frees the indwelling life force of their own natures. With no neat ending and no resolution, we are left to wonder about the nature of life itself.

⁴³² *ibid.*, p. 186.

The three works presented here encapsulate the complexities of life in ways redolent with meaning. All situated in the local worlds of their unfolding, the challenges that erupt in the lives of ordinary people constitutes the unifying force that sets them in complimentary relation to one another.

In *Soil and Soul*, the expanding political landscape of activism and change steers the reclamation of two islands that many have never heard of, much less encountered. Left to flourish, the flow of life will move into rhythms set by the spaces and places that constitute home. Topographies and geologies left intact, the unfolding of hopes and aspirations will no doubt run their course. Left behind will be a legacy that informs new battles.

For the women of the Guild, the emancipation that comes with co-operation and democratic participation is a legacy in itself. *Life as we have known it* is shared and celebrated across borders and boundaries - temporal, social and political. First published in 1930, the inspiration to reclaim the most fundamental of all human rights is far from done. It persists and constitutes one of the most critical elements of local life, then and now.

At the most individual level, *Housekeeping* draws the need for certainty into the unfathomable depths of life. Interiors known only from within meet the external worlds of social life. Values collide with imagination and uncertainty is, by turns, resisted and embraced.

At journey's end the three works leave behind a combined legacy. They each register the fact that whatever is alive and visible in the outer world can be known through the senses. By contrast, vast interiors will be known only through their enactment. Sustenance and sustaining, whatever form they take, are informed by the ways in which we choose to forge bonds between these dimensions of living. To value the one over the other will inevitably diminish both.

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Appendix A

Project Information, Participant Consent, Copyright and Personal Safety documents are provided below.

Project Information



Community Sustainability - An opportunity to share your views...

Jess McColl is a postgraduate student at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia. As part of a two year research process Jess is travelling to communities that may have a specific interest in and commitment to sustainability. Whilst sustainability means different things to different people, the focus of this research is on the views, values and experiences of community members as they develop ways to meet sustainability challenges that are spiritual, social and environmental.

With a clear focus on community residents, Jess is developing a collaborative, creative process. In talking with her about your own views on sustainability and your experiences you will be able to contribute to a fuller understanding of the diverse ways in which individuals and groups are working towards a sustainable future.

Jess is looking for people who may be interested in being part of a process that will involve still-photography and voice recordings. She will be asking to photograph and record conversations between herself and individual participants as they talk about their motivations and experiences to get involved in sustainability initiatives and activities. She will also be working with people on an individual level and asking them to participate in photography sessions about the places or environments in their communities that hold deep meaning. Added to the photographs will be some sound and voice recordings that participants provide as they talk about why specific places or aspects of community hold the importance that they do. Residents from each of the communities that participate will receive a digital copy of all artefacts produced.

If you would like more information about this project you can contact Jess via email or phone:

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Jess's supervisor is:

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Telephone: 03 9919 4442



About Victoria University

Victoria University (VU) is a multi-sector institution (higher education and TAFE) with excellence in teaching, training, research and scholarship. VU operates primarily at campuses in the western suburbs of Melbourne (Australia), Melbourne city centre and locations provided by partners in Asia and Europe. As the primary university in Melbourne's western region, VU is proud to deliver courses, research and engagement activities that are locally relevant and globally significant. Victoria University has more than 50,000 students enrolled at local campuses and international sites.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH



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INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to be a part of a collaborative research process that explores community sustainability. The research is concerned with the ways in which individual community residents engage with a range of sustainability processes. Through the use of still photography and sound the research will look at the views, values and intentions of people as they enter into the life of communities that are striving to meet the challenges of social and environmental sustainability.

As a collaborative, creative project, approximately 8 residents in three different communities will be asked to participate in a process where they will individually speak with the researcher about their own experiences and views about sustainability. In addition there will be a photographic component to the project where approximately 8 residents can participate in photographing images in the community that express what is most valued and representative of sustainability.

Once the research (photography and sound) has been completed the combined artefacts from each of the communities will be part of a public exhibition to be held in Melbourne, Australia. In addition, each of the participants will receive a digital copy of the artefacts that they help develop.

The underlying reason for individualising this research is to put into the public domain the views, values and images that express sustainability and thereby contribute to a broader community awareness that 'people create change'.

The specific Aim of the Project:

To develop an account of the sustainability of community life through the use of photography and voice recording

The photographic work will capture images that individual participants consider best represent their most valued examples of what sustainability means. The researcher will also record their views about the ways in which world-view, beliefs and intentions shaped sustainability initiatives. A more extensive 'voice recording' may also be used to complement this aspect of engagement, particularly where a participant wishes to provide a more extensive account of his or her experience of sustainability at the community level.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I,

Of

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:

“Intending Community – Space, Place, Home: Unearthing Sustainability at the Margins” being conducted at Victoria University by: Dr. Julie Stephens (Principal Researcher) and Ms. Jess McColl (Student Researcher)

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by: **Jess McColl** and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

(Tick appropriate box and initial your response)

- To be filmed or photographed in conversation with Jess McColl in a discussion about my views, values and experiences of working toward sustainability in my own community

Yes ☐ No ☐
- To participate with Jess McColl in isolating and photographing those features of my community that hold deep significance for me

Yes ☐ No ☐
- To have any words that I use to describe still photographic images overlaid onto the photography

Yes ☐ No ☐
- To participate in a discussion about my views, values, experiences and intentions about sustainability initiatives and to have that discussion digitally recorded as sound only

Yes ☐ No ☐
- To have any contribution that I make to film, photography or voice recording in this project to enter the public domain as exhibition artefacts, teaching or community engagement resources

Yes ☐ No ☐
- Having my name appear in the public domain as a contributor to this project

Yes ☐ No ☐

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that where I request anonymity any information I provide will be de-identified and kept confidential.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher Associate Professor, Dr. Julie Stephens (+0061) 03 9919 4442 Julie.Stephens@vu.edu.au If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics & Biosafety Coordinator, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 phone (03) 9919 4148.

[*please note: Where the participant/s are aged under 18, separate parental consent is required; where the participant/s are unable to answer for themselves due to mental illness or disability, parental or guardian consent may be required.]



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Copyright Release Form

I consent and agree that Ms. Jess McColl and Associate Professor Dr. Julie Stephens, Victoria University, as part of the research project entitled “Intending Community – Space, Place, Home: Unearthing Sustainability at the Margins”, can use the photographs and sound recordings taken by me or by Jess McColl and use them for the purposes of public exhibition, teaching resources, publication of a thesis and related academic publications.

I do hereby release to Ms. Jess McColl and Associate Professor Dr. Julie Stephens all rights to use these photographs and sound recordings in print and electronic form and agree that any uses described herein may be made without compensation.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Name of parent/guardian (if participant is under 18):

Signature:

Date:



GENERAL GUIDELINES ASSOCIATED WITH RISKS INVOLVED IN TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS IN PUBLIC AREAS

When taking photographs during the project participants should:

1. Understand that where participants elect to photograph images themselves, responsibilities come with taking photographs in public and private places. Participants should consider how they would react to another person photographing them in public in order to appreciate other people's concerns.
2. Respect the privacy and rights of other people. Some people may not want their photograph taken and it should not be assumed that they do even when they are in a public place. Taking photographs of a group of people from a distance may be more acceptable than close up images.
3. Ensure their own safety at all times. Ways of keeping safe may include being with someone when taking photographs, allowing plenty of time when taking photographs and remaining alert to keep safe around roads and any other dangers.
4. Provide an explanation and obtain written consent when taking photographs of friends or family members to ensure that they understand why the photograph is being taken and how it will be used. Respect the rights of friends or family members to say no.
5. Always carry the letter explaining the Project and be prepared to provide the letter if requested. Encourage any concerned people to contact the researcher for further information or to discuss the project further.