

CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIVISM AND THE PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MOVEMENT

IN A WORLD WHERE CLIMATE CHANGE IS EVERYTHING...

CONCEPTUALIZING CLIMATE ACTIVISM AND EXPLORING THE PEOPLE'S
CLIMATE MOVEMENT

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LAY ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the strategies and imaginations of activists working to inspire action on climate change and considers different anthropological approaches to conceptualizing activism and social movements in the contemporary moment. I use the framework of a "social imagination" as a way to account for the connections between activists and social movement actors that cannot be explained by the concepts of "culture" and "community." I then situate climate activism as a social movement based on four key principles: crisis mitigation, social change, collective organizing and individual agency. This research is based on ethnographic fieldwork with the Toronto People's Climate Movement and ends with a consideration of how this particular group of activists is working to address climate change at a community level through strategies that take personal autonomy, civic engagement and well-being as the starting point for sustainable societies.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the strategies and imaginations of activists working to inspire action on climate change. It is based on my ethnographic fieldwork with the Toronto People’s Climate Movement as well as my own experiences as an activist living and working in Toronto. In conceptualizing climate activists anthropologically, I understand social movement actors as connected by shared imaginations rooted in universalizing scientific discourses and defined by deeply-held concerns for climate change and the motivation to take action. I devise an explanatory schema for the climate movement based on the “code-sort” method that shows how the strategies of climate activists are informed by four key values: *crisis mitigation*, *social change*, *collective organizing* and *individual agency*. These values converge in different iterations to inspire a variety of activist strategies and imaginations. Some are about getting climate change onto the public agenda and emphasize the urgent need for top-down solutions to reduce emissions. Others work to factor personal autonomy and well-being into their goals and methods, taking as their starting point the understanding that, for solutions to climate change to be adopted by society at large, they must consider the needs of both people and the environment in their designs of sustainable systems. To begin to understand “how climate change comes to matter” (Callison 2014) demands that we venture into a different world; a world in which the threat of ecological catastrophe is not the elephant in the room but the guiding lens of every conversation; in which subject matter avoided in polite society is the focus of every planning meeting, potluck and PowerPoint presentation; in which the not-so-novel question of how to live a moral life meets the far-more-recent dilemma of how to live one that is also sustainable. In the imaginations of those who inhabit this world, climate change is everything.

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* * *

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PREFACE

Some notes on style and nomenclature:

Quotations

Quotations have been condensed in some cases with omitted portions indicated by ellipses (...). Words or phrases that did not modify the meaning of the quote (e.g., “you know,” “kind of,” “sort of,” “like,” “so,” “um” and “uh”) were omitted in many instances and without the use of an ellipsis. For example, in a sentence like, “So um I just think that, you know, we all have to like try and do something about climate change,” the words, “so,” “um,” “you know,” and “like,” may be omitted without an ellipsis. In the case of one or more activists for whom English was a second language, certain grammatical corrections may have been made without the use of [square brackets] upon the request of the informants for reasons of identity protection.

Names and Pseudonyms

Where permission has been granted to do so, informants’ real given names (but not their surnames) have been utilized. In all other instance, the pseudonym, “Anonymous,” is used or no name is provided. Other names, such as those of locations or organizations, have been omitted where it necessary to protect the privacy of one or more informants.

Citation Style

All notes and bibliographic entries are in Chicago Style, with reference to the 16th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style.

Introduction

This past fall I explored how climate activists in Toronto, Ontario are initiating social change. I did so for the purposes of completing my Master's thesis in social-cultural anthropology, and for a few additional reasons. The first was to see how climate activists – citizens actively engaged in efforts to solve the climate crisis – are attempting to envision and create more sustainable societies. The second was to see how I – a graduate student of anthropology and concerned citizen – might be able to use my research to the mutual enrichment of the climate change movement and the scholarly literature on social change. Informed by my own prior experiences as a climate activist in Toronto, I reintegrated myself into the climate movement as an ethnographic researcher in order to study the strategies and imaginations that activists are using to target the root causes of global climate change at the local level.

Though part of this project is about comparing and contrasting different activist strategies in terms of their tactics, goals and outcomes, it is also a theoretical exercise in conceptualizing social movement actors and the shared imaginaries that unite them. To begin to understand “how climate change comes to matter” (Callison 2014) to those who are actively engaged in trying to address it, I attempt to paint a portrait of a particular world; a world in which the threat of ecological catastrophe is not the elephant in the room but the guiding lens of every conversation; in which subject matter avoided in polite society is the focus of every planning meeting, potluck and PowerPoint presentation; in which the not-so-novel question of how to live a moral life meets the far-more-recent dilemma of how to live one that is also sustainable. The lives of those who inhabit this world revolve around the totalizing aim of creating more sustainable societies. In this world, climate change is everything.

* * *

Climate change is among the most urgent and challenging global crises of the contemporary era, and the strategies and imaginations of activists working to initiate action on this issue can provide valuable insights into how to address it. While many solutions to climate change exist in the form of green technologies, renewable energy systems and eco-friendly policies, these mechanisms are not being implemented fast enough or on a large enough scale to bring global emissions in line with science-based targets. With the future of our current lifeways under threat, many climate change activists are seeking new strategies to inspire sustainable social change – strategies which foreground the needs of societies and individuals in their calculus of environmental sustainability.

This research has its roots in my time as an activist following my graduation from the University of Toronto. During this time I volunteered for the social and environmental justice organization the Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) and the climate action group Toronto350.org, which were both based at the University of Toronto. My time with these groups is, in part, what inspired me to pursue a Master's degree in anthropology in the form of an ethnography of climate change activism. I was interested in the intersections of social justice and environmental activism and deeply critical of activist efforts to address climate change as I was observing them play out in my communities. I felt that I could contribute to the movement from the vantage of a critical scholar.

The year I left activism for other pursuits was the same year the People's Climate March took place in New York City during the 2014 United Nations Climate Summit. This event was a significant moment for climate activism because it signaled the formation of a mass movement to address the climate challenge. The sheer scale of the event was unprecedented. Some reports estimated a turnout north of 300,000 participants – and that was only in New York City. The

New York march was accompanied by hundreds of sister marches in cities around the world, including Toronto. The scale of the participation was no coincidence but the result of meticulous planning and organizing by a consortium of climate action groups and organizations, including, 350.org and Avaaz.org (Young 2015). It was followed up by another People’s Climate mobilization in 2015 during the Paris Climate Summit and, most recently, a second People’s Climate March in 2017. These mobilizations were part of concerted efforts to build a global movement to solve the climate crisis, efforts that posit climate change as a game-changing threat that will require a mass movement to solve.

My interest in the People’s Climate March and activist efforts to build a climate movement ultimately led me to the Toronto People’s Climate Movement (PCM), a group which formed for the specific purpose of organizing the Toronto-based sister march to the People’s Climate March in New York. I was interested in how the project of building a global movement had advanced since the 2014 marches, and I was curious about what movement-building entails beyond the organization of mass mobilizations. How do these mobilizations become more than just isolated events?

What I discovered upon meeting the Toronto PCM was a genuine embodiment of the “think globally, act locally” sentiment in the form of a group of community leaders and organizers working to build climate sustainability from the ground up. Their work represents, in my view, a deeply humanistic approach to climate change advocacy that is rooted in addressing the social side of creating environmental sustainability. The social systems component in sustainability is the focus of my analysis in the following pages.

Theoretical Positioning

There are many ways to approach the study of activist responses to climate change. This thesis takes a decidedly social-cultural approach. I focus on how activists engage with universalizing political and scientific discourses around climate change and in so doing create a social imaginary rooted in a sense of participation in a global movement. In this regard, I engage in particular with the work of cultural anthropologist Anna Tsing and human geographer David Hulme (Chapter 1), as well as cultural theorist and author Amitav Ghosh (Chapter 3). I also incorporate the psychology of behavior change into my analysis. This field of research has had a significant influence on my primary informants, the People's Climate Movement, in terms of how they design and implement their strategies. I consider both how the findings of psychologists like Saffron O'Neill and Sophie Nicholson-Cole have influenced the work of the PCM and attempt to integrate these findings into my own analysis (Chapter 3).

Given the significant amount of attention I give to environmental sustainability discourse in this analysis, it is worth noting that my philosophical position is more humanistic than environmentalist. Contemporary writings in anthropology are working to de-emphasize the centrality of humans in the pursuits of the discipline. Although I engage with post-humanism somewhat in my critique of Enlightenment distinctions between human and nature, I consider sustainability explicitly from a humanist standpoint in terms of how social worlds and systems might be reimagined to incorporate climate concerns into their fundamental tenets. It is in this sense that I speak of “social sustainability,” which is a term from sustainability discourse that posits the social as one of three pillars of a sustainable system (the other two being economic and environmental). Social sustainability, in the sense I use it, considers factors in creating a sustainable system that are rooted in social and civic life. I am not opposed to the goals of post-

humanism in an ideological sense, and I try to keep them in mind throughout this analysis. But I am cognizant of my own limitations in thinking through issues from a non-human perspective, and thus I leave considerations of non-human nature out of this discussion.

Research Objectives

In limiting the scope of my analysis, my investigation concerns itself principally with the strategies and imaginations of climate activists working to effect sustainable social change, by which I mean, systemic change that is both socially and environmentally sustainable. I consider how activists envision, design and implement strategies directed at creating more sustainable social configurations via the mechanisms available to non-government actors (i.e. ordinary citizens). My goal is not to evaluate or assess the relative efficacy per se of different strategies but rather to show how values and concerns around climate change become manifested in the goals, beliefs, tactics, motivations, and communal lives of climate activists. A part of this project entails developing a framework for conceptualizing climate activists as an ethnographic unit in such a way as to account for the collective experiences of social movement actors who may lack formal ties. I am also hoping to contribute to the scholarship on social change as it pertains to local engagements with universal discourses and global crises.

Purposes of this Study

What this thesis does not attempt to do is quantify the outcomes of activist efforts to address climate change in a systematic way. Doing so would be beyond the scope of a qualitative ethnography. My much simpler aim is to explore how the people most concerned about climate change are translating those concerns into actionable efforts and visions for a new world. While I do offer some insight into how these strategies play out and what outcomes they achieve relative to their original intent, this is not meant as advice on future actions to take. Rather, I offer my

observations on what a few Toronto activists are doing to fight global warming in the hopes that they might be useful to these groups (and others like them) in helping to generate new strategies and directions for climate change advocacy in the midst of an extremely important crisis. I also hope to contribute to scholarship on the intersections of social change, sustainability and the imagination.

Applications beyond this Study

While many of the observations laid out in this thesis will only apply to climate activism in Toronto, many will undoubtedly ring true for a broad spectrum of activists around the world – particularly those who have been influenced by North American traditions associated with individuals like Bill McKibbin, Naomi Klein, and James Hanson, as well as organizations like 350.org, Greenpeace, and Avaaz.org. A diverse and multi-cultural metropolis, Toronto is an excellent vantage from which to understand global discourses and how they manifest in the lives of politically-engaged citizens. Such manifestations reveal a number of curious paradoxes particular to the conditions of our times. For instance, as they call for global collaboration in addressing the systemic roots of climate change, they espouse resistance to the environmentally-harmful forces of globalization. As they consider how changing environments will demand geopolitical reconfigurations in the service of social justice, they advocate for localized and autonomous communities. The ways in which concerned citizens engage with scientific claims around the climate crisis can afford invaluable insights into the local articulations of global forces. Such forces, I contend, can be observed ethnographically in the imaginations and strategies of activists.

Chapter-by-Chapter Overview

This thesis is divided into three chapters. I begin with an introduction to the relevant theory and contextual background on my subject matter, followed by an overview of the methodology used in conducting and analyzing my fieldwork, and, finally, I explore two separate but interrelated case studies of climate activism in Toronto. The three chapters are best read in sequence but can also be taken as stand-alone articles. Each employs a different mode of analysis and should be assessed on its own terms. Here is a brief overview of the path I have laid out in the coming chapters.

Chapter 1 is structured along the lines of a literature review. It introduces debates around anthropological engagements with the universal and the imaginary and situates these debates in relation to the pertinent scholarship on social movements and climate activism. I lay the groundwork for an anthropological exploration of climate activism in terms of a social imagination, and I sketch out some of the important events, discourses and politics that have informed this imagination. Interwoven throughout this analysis is an interpretive narration of my personal history and experiences with activism that is meant to, first, expose my biases in conducting this research, and, second, offer up an entry point to the imaginary world of climate activism via the subjective musings of one particular activist (myself). This largely experimental endeavor aims to offer insight as to whether there is any merit to the conceptualization of social movements in terms of social imaginations and whether such imaginations can be assessed at the level of the individual.

In Chapter 2, I describe how I went about planning and orchestrating my fieldwork as well as the process by which I analyzed my data. In collecting my field data I employed standard ethnographic practices of participant observation, naturalistic observation and one-on-one

interviewing. I established contact with the pertinent communities and then integrated myself into their worlds. In seeking a systematic approach to organizing and analyzing the vast amount of data I amassed over the span of approximately five months I selected the “code-sorting” method (as outlined by Sonja K. Foss and William Waters). Coding my data and then sorting the codes seemed like the best way to minimize my own biases while being as inclusive as possible of all of the observations and transcriptions I amassed. Using this approach, I developed an explanatory schema for how activist strategies to address climate change are informed by a set of core values I dub crisis mitigation, social change, collective organizing and individual agency.

Finally, in Chapter 3 I conduct a comparative case study analysis. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first focuses on a campaign for fossil fuel divestment at the University of Toronto which I participated in as a new alumna. It discusses how moral arguments have been used by both activists and corporations to, in the case of the former, demand action on climate change, and, in the case of the latter, justify the continuation of the status quo. In the second section, I turn to my fieldwork with the People’s Climate Movement and discuss their more positive approach to engaging the public on climate change. This approach is rooted in a fundamental emphasis on the notion that living a life aligned to one’s values is intrinsically-motivating and conducive to progressive change and sustainability. Their strategies work to build up the motivations of individuals and communities to take action on climate change by avoiding a science-based rhetoric of urgency and instead helping people to tie their own values and motivations to climate concerns. In the third and final section, I extend my analysis to the climate movement more broadly and consider what values are being deployed to build solidarity and movement cohesion on an inter- and intra-group level. My contention here is that, ultimately, for

solutions to climate change to be implemented, they must reflect the needs of individuals and their communities.

Chapter 1

Background and Theory

In this section I outline the theoretical foundations of my ethnography of climate change activism. To do so, I integrate an analysis of the pertinent scholarship and history of climate activism with a semi-fictionalized narrative of my own experiences.¹ My analysis centers on climate activism in Toronto, Ontario, but I also aspire to an engagement with its universal entanglements. Concerns about climate change reflect “the accomplishments of the universal” in the sense that they are rooted in the mobilizing power of “transboundary” knowledge.² At the heart of many activists’ responses to climate change around the globe are shared beliefs in the urgency and immediacy of the climate crisis, beliefs which are framed by universalizing scientific and political discourses seeking to explain and address the globally-dispersed effects of the Earth’s changing climate. To understand the global connections between climate activists I invoke the concept of social imaginaries, understanding the social imagination of climate activists in terms of the primacy of climate change in the daily lives of its individual participants, offering my own story as an example. I show how this social imaginary has shifted in recent years toward an integration of the tenets of social justice and a focus on movement-building. As local worlds have become entangled with the webs of globalization, the principle ways in which people find and make meaning in their lives, I contend, are often rooted in forms of connection that transcend local surroundings and which may be conceptualized as imaginary.

¹ The personal narrative sections are not precise representations of my personal history. They are intended to be read as creative interpretations of my experiences meant to reflect the theories and themes discussed in this chapter. I also modified or omitted certain details to protect certain individuals’ privacy.

² Ibid.

My Story Begins

I never thought I would become an environmentalist. To this day, the label feels ill-fitting. When I was a child I wanted to be a movie star, then an author, then a teacher, then a doctor, then a filmmaker – but never a botanist, or a biologist, and certainly not an activist. I preferred quiet, solitary pursuits. I was hesitant to assert myself in any situation. I sat in class like a statue while others passed notes and whispered behind the teacher's back. I loved animals, but encountered them primarily in cartoon form. I was a city girl, born and raised on the mean streets of Toronto, Ontario. I took piano lessons, sang in the school choir and sat glued to the television every night. I was not a natural born nature-lover but had the heart of a humanist. I cared deeply for the well-being of those around me and felt badly for anyone who had to suffer. I knew that I was lucky to have a home and a family and that many children did not. I knew that many things were unfair in the world and that all I could do was to be as good as possible. I did what I was told and tried not to complain. I went to church every Sunday and always tried to be my best. Sometimes, it felt like that was the only thing I could control.

I was never much of an environmentalist, but I knew that the planet needs our protection. Like other urbanites, I learned to recycle, to conserve energy and to reduce waste. And, like other urbanites, I always thought that this would be enough. I thought that as long as I consumed responsibly and treated my environment with respect, I could continue to live my life the way I had always lived it. I could go on skating in the winter and swimming in the summer, and I wouldn't have to worry that one day my environment would change - that there would come a winter when the rink would not freeze over and there would be no skating in the park; that the beaches would be closed to the public because the rising waters had flooded their banks; that the seasons would come two months later or last two months longer.

I expected to get older, to become a woman, to move out on my own and start a family, to have my own house, my own car, my own TV, and perhaps even a lot more. I expected the world to change a little but mainly for the better. There would be cures for diseases, for poverty and for hunger. The wars would end, and all the suffering and unlucky people would have what I had. But even if nothing else got better, even if nothing I envisioned ever came to pass, I thought, the Earth would stay the same. There may be fewer trees or fewer species on the planet. But at least, I thought, Toronto will always be Toronto.

Conceptualizing Climate Activism – Part I: Imaginations

In recent years, anthropologists have become increasingly interested in exploring the human imagination.³⁴ At the same time, it has become commonplace for scholars to assert that a failure of imagination is at the heart of many of humanity's woes, including, and especially, those concerning neoliberal capitalism.⁵⁶ As Anna Tsing writes, "The successes of corporate consolidation, free-ranging finance, and transnational economic standardization backed by military muscle have made it difficult for people all over the world to think beyond the story of neoliberal globalization."⁷ The contention seems to be that the world is now subject to a totalizing, totalitarian political-economic system, and one which disallows any and all alternatives to exist – even in our minds. To combat the psychological tyranny of our current system, we must turn "away from the sureties of a self-making future to re-open a sense of mystery that might yet enrich the possibilities for imagining the about to be present."⁸ In other

³ Appadurai, Arjun. "Grassroots globalization and the research imagination." *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 1-19.

⁴ Daniel Stankiewicz, "Against Imagination: On the Ambiguities of a Composite Concept," *American Anthropologist* 118, no. 4 (2016): 796–810, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/aman.12696>.

⁵ Fredric Jameson, "Future City," *New Left Review* 21 (May-June 2003): n.p., accessed August 4, 2017, <https://newleftreview.org/II/21/fredric-jameson-future-city>.

⁶ Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* John Hunt Publishing, 2009.

⁷ Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 269.

⁸ *Ibid.*

words, if we are to have any hope of solving our collective troubles we must first begin to conceive of alternative worlds, and doing so means tapping into the mystical and generative process of imagination.

Among the great challenges of the contemporary era of neoliberal globalization is anthropogenic climate change. The role the imagination might play in addressing the climate crisis has become a popular subject of inquiry, notably, in the field of human geography.⁹¹⁰ But the contention here is not so much that the imagination can be our greatest tool in solving climate change. Rather, this research is less concerned with how we might affect climate change than how climate change is affecting us and how it is opening up pathways to new paradigms of thought.

As a resource of the imagination, the idea of climate change can be deployed around our geographical, social and virtual worlds in creative ways. The idea of climate change can stimulate new thinking about energy and transport technologies. It can inspire new artistic creations in visual, written and dramatised media. It can invigorate efforts to protect our citizens from the hazards of climate. The idea of climate change can provoke new ethical and theological thinking about our relationship with the future. It can arouse new interest in how science and culture inter-relate. It can galvanize new social movements to explore new ways of living in urban and rural settings. And the idea of climate change can touch each one of us as we reflect on the goals and values that matter to us.¹¹

Here, climate change is understood less as a problem in need of imaginative solutions than a tool – “a resource of the imagination” – and one which can be used “in creative ways” to “inspire,” “invigorate” and “provoke” new modes of “thinking” and “living.” This is a vision of climate change as a source of creative possibility. Climate change is more than just a call to action. It

⁹ Brenda L. Murphy, and Jo-Anne Muise Lawless, "Climate Change and the Stories We Tell," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes* 46, no. 2 (2012): 196-220, accessed August 4, 2017, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/515019>.

¹⁰ Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Hulme, Mike. "Why we Disagree about Climate Change." *Carbon Yearbook: The annual review of business and climate change*, October 2009, 41-43, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://mikehulme.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Hulme-Carbon-Yearbook.pdf>.

provides the opportunity and the imaginary toolkit necessary to generate possibilities for alternatives to current conditions that are unsustainable for the climate.

An examination of climate activism may help to illuminate how the idea of climate change can transform the imaginations of human beings and how thinking through the climate crisis might help to generate new ideas as to how to create more just and sustainable societies. Climate activists are among those ordinary citizens most actively engaged in the climate issue. Using the mechanisms available to non-government actors – mechanisms like social-movement building, political campaigning, and direct action, to name a few¹² – they embody and enact what it means to take climate change literally, as a severe and immediate threat to both human and non-human existence. Though anthropology has engaged quite a bit in research around climate change, such endeavours have been mainly in the realm of archaeology and in studies of human-environment relationships.¹³ Research on climate activism specifically has tended to focus on local and community-based responses to changing weather patterns and environmental conditions.¹⁴ But there have been numerous calls for anthropologists to make a concerted effort to engage more with the climate crisis, both in their actual research and in doing more to communicate the crisis and its surrounding issues to the public.¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷

¹² I define and discuss the different strategies of climate activism in more detail in Chapter 2.

¹³ Susan A. Crate, "Climate and Culture: Anthropology in the Era of Contemporary Climate Change," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011): 175–94, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.012809.104925>.

¹⁴ For a pre-2010 comprehensive overview, see Susan A. Crate, and Mark Nuttall, *Anthropology and Climate Change: From Encounters to Actions* (Taylor & Francis, 2009).

¹⁵ Courtney Desiree Morris, "Where It Hurts: 2014 Year in Review," *American Anthropologist* 117, no. 3 (September 2015): 540–552, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/aman.12284>.

¹⁶ Hans A. Baer, "Engaged Anthropology in 2011: A View from the Antipodes in a Turbulent Era." *American Anthropologist* 114, no. 2 (June 2012): 217–226, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2012.01420.x>.

¹⁷ Mari H. Clarke, "Interrogating Power: Engaged Energy Anthropology," *Reviews in Anthropology* 44, no. 4 (December 2015): 202–224, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00938157.2015.1116325>.

To study climate activism anthropologically, it is useful to invoke the concept of social imaginaries. Because climate activists are dispersed around the globe but often lack formal linkages, the place-based concepts of culture and community are in many ways insufficient to account for the sense of participation in a larger, global movement that many activists espouse. With the rise of the work of Benedict Anderson, Michel Foucault, and others, the concepts of social imagination and social imaginaries have entered the conversation to try to account for phenomena of social collectivity which cannot be explained by the concept of culture alone. The social imaginary is defined by Charles Taylor as “what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society.”¹⁸ For anthropologists, social imaginations can be observed in the stories we tell about ourselves, to ourselves, and to each other.^{19,20} Shared narratives and discourses around climate change are one way that activists “make sense” of the current global situation. They also act as source of connection between activists and to a sense of participation in a larger movement.

Exploring ethnographically the new forms of imagined social connection that climate change makes possible is one example of how engaging with the climate issue can potentially open up new imaginary vistas. Insofar as climate change is conceptualized as a global crisis by those working to address it, new forms of global connection also become possible. Such experiences of global connection, furthermore, provide an avenue to tap into some of the universal aspects of the human condition in the contemporary, globalized world. As Anna Tsing writes:

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

¹⁹ Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (UBC Press, 2014).

²⁰ Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

To turn to universals is to identify knowledge that moves – mobile and mobilizing – across localities and cultures. Whether it is seen as underlying or transcending cultural difference, the mission of the universal is to form bridges or channels of circulation. Knowledge gained from particular experience percolates into these channels, widening rather than interrupting them. We must step outside the boundaries of locality to ask what’s meant by “universal.”²¹

There is a tendency in anthropology to shy away from studying universal connections but to instead remain focused on their local articulations. Tsing contends that cultural anthropologists traditionally have avoided engaging with universals because they run counter to a “notion of cultural relativism” which posits universals as “folk beliefs, like gods or ghosts, with efficacy only within the cultural system that gives them life.”²² To engage ethnographically with climate activism demands a consideration of the universal in terms of the transboundary forms of knowledge and discourse surrounding it. The universalizing nature of discourses around climate change has contributed to experiences of global connection rooted in but also transcending localized forms of existence in the form of global social movements. Climate activism is thus a valuable entry point to explore how an engagement with climate change can create imagined forms of social connection as part of citizen efforts to create more sustainable local and global societies. It is also potentially a way to tap into some of the universal issues inherent to the conditions of our times.

Finding the Cause...

I never aspired to change the world, though I hoped it might change anyway.

Yet, there I was, newly graduated from university and looking for something to do after work when I decided to devote myself to activism. It wasn’t so much a desire to make a difference as an inability to accept things as they were that drove me to it.

²¹ Tsing, *Friction*, 7.

²² Tsing, *Friction*, 7.

Upon graduation, I landed a job changing lightbulbs in a department store. A friend of a friend was a manager at the Hudson's Bay Company. The pay was not ideal, but I didn't mind the work. I liked the feeling I was performing an essential service. I was making the world a brighter place one burnt-out bulb at a time. But in spite of the joy I derived from my godly task of creating light each day, I found myself feeling restless. Changing lightbulbs was, I felt, a noble day job. But it didn't fill me with the sense of a higher purpose I was looking for in life. On the contrary, working on the inside of one of Canada's most emblematic "cathedrals of consumption"²³ fueled my desire to rebel against the machinery of consumer capitalism that was contributing to so much waste-production and also seemed cruelly indifferent to the people who were keeping it so well-oiled (and well-lit).

And that's when I dove, head first, into activism.

I'm not sure how I came to focus on climate change. I had always believed in the three R's – reduce, reuse, recycle – and I did my best to keep a low carbon footprint. But I never considered myself an environmentalist. I was an urbanite, through and through. How could a person call herself an environmentalist while also living in a city like Toronto? To paraphrase the comedian Louis C.K., cities are like the planet's version of litter. As soon as you become an environmentalist, I thought, you automatically become a hypocrite.

The sequence of events that led me to become one of those hypocrites began when I started looking for social justice groups to volunteer with. After meeting some anti-capitalist organizers at a student street fair I joined their organization and began helping out at events around campus. I started following email listservs, community newsletters, and event message

²³ I characterize the Hudson's Bay Company according to Ritzer's definition of "cathedrals of consumption" as a testament to the sacred status of consumer culture under neoliberal capitalism: "The new means of consumption can be seen as "cathedrals of consumption" – that is, they are structured, often successfully, to have an enchanted, sometimes even sacred, religious character." George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption* (Pine Forge Press, 2005), 7.

boards. I was actively in search of any and all opportunities that aligned with my ideals and that would allow me to contribute to creating the culture and society that I wanted to be a part of.

Then, one day, on a balmy October evening, I found myself heading to the university and up to top of the Education Studies building for a meeting that would change my life significantly.

When I arrived, the setting sun was beaming in through the windows like a beacon of brighter days to come. I walked in, and there was young man standing at the front of the empty classroom in a blue T-shirt with the number 350 stamped on the front. I was the first to arrive, and that made me a little nervous. But all of my anxieties were dispelled when he enthusiastically welcomed me in.

What does 350 mean? I asked.

It's the ideal concentration of carbon dioxide the atmosphere, he answered.

Oh, I see...

350 parts per million, he explained, was the pre-industrial level of atmospheric CO₂ as well as the name of his group.

Is anyone else coming? I asked.

He smiled.

I had been to many different activist meetings and events by then – mental health awareness, opposing the prison industrial complex, indigenous solidarity, Marxist revolution, fighting the patriarchy – but I had never seen such an empty room. It was just the two of us at first. Then, later, two more would join, one of whom was another member of the group. The meeting was essentially a volunteer recruitment for the University of Toronto fossil fuel divestment campaign, and it turned out to be my entry point into the world of climate activism.

Over the course of the hour-long discussion I became enchanted with it all – the organization, the cause, the strategy, his smile. Yes, of course, I would put up some posters on my way home, and, of course, I would come to the group’s weekly meeting next Tuesday. I was ready to work, and here was a plan to make a concrete difference in the world and perhaps even affect the course of history. For the first time in a long time, I had a real project to sink my teeth into. I was going to be among the small, committed group of citizens actually changing the world, and it filled me with a sense of undeniable passion.

Conceptualizing Climate Activism – Part II: Strategies

Among activists working to inspire action on climate change, it is uncommon to encounter the view that a lack of imagination lies at the heart of humanity’s failure to prevent the climate crisis. The far more conventional wisdom is that a lack of will is our greatest obstacle in this endeavour. The belief that inaction on climate change – from governments to individuals to corporations to communities – arises from a lack of motivation or concern for the environment has been at the heart of strategies of climate activism since the early days of the movement. A significant component of such efforts comprised strategies to convince various publics about the urgency of the crisis. This is what some refer to as the “Al Gore” method of climate advocacy. It involves lobbying and lecturing concerned publics as to the scientific evidence for climate change along with its dire implications for life on planet Earth. It is a method that lends itself to solutions for climate change rooted in the immediate and large-scale reduction of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. It frames climate change as an impending Armageddon and carbon mitigation as the only way to prevent an ecological apocalypse.

In 2013, when I began doing climate activism in Toronto with the group Toronto350.org, our work was deeply rooted in the Al Gore method of climate advocacy. A grassroots

organization formed as an independent chapter of the U.S.-based environmental organization 350.org, the strategies of Toronto350.org were largely informed by the work and writings of 350.org founder and leader, Bill McKibben. McKibben is a prolific author and environmental activist who founded 350.org as a way to promote action on climate change in line with the recommendations of scientists like James Hansen. Hansen was one of the early proponents of science-based targets for determining the maximum amount of carbon dioxide that could safely be emitted in order to prevent catastrophic global warming,^{24,25} targets that were included by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in their Fourth Assessment Report.²⁶

In 2012, McKibben and 350.org launched a campaign called, “Do the Math,” which was about promoting the use of science-based targets in strategies to curb global emissions. The most important numbers were: 2,795 gigatonnes (the effective emissions of the global supply of coal, oil and gas held by fossil fuel companies) divided by 565 gigatonnes (the remaining carbon budget for the entire world) equals five times the amount of fossil fuels that can safely be burned if global warming is to be kept below two degrees Celsius (the maximum amount of warming that is safe for humanity given our current lifeways).²⁷ In my work with Toronto350.org, promoting these numbers through our various campaigns, including a campaign for fossil fuel

²⁴ James Hansen, Makiko Sato, Pushker Kharecha, David Beerling, Robert Berner, Valerie Masson-Delmotte, Mark Pagani, Maureen Raymo, Dana L. Royer, and James C. Zachos, "Target Atmospheric CO₂: Where Should Humanity Aim?," arXiv preprint arXiv:0804.1126 (2008), accessed August 4, 2017, <https://arxiv.org/abs/0804.1126>.

²⁵ Johan Rockström, Will Steffen, Kevin Noone, Åsa Persson, F. Stuart Chapin, Eric F. Lambin, Timothy M. Lenton et al, "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity," *Nature* 461, no. 7263 (2009): 472-475), accessed August 4, 2017, Academic OneFile.

²⁶ IPCC, 2007: *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, Pachauri, R.K and Reisinger, A. (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 104 pp, accessed August 4, 2017, http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_full_report.pdf.

²⁷ Bill McKibben, "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math," *Rolling Stone*, July 19, 2012, accessed July 4, 2017, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719>.

divestment at the University of Toronto²⁸ and anti-pipeline lobbying, was our primary objective. We were acutely aware of the science on climate and the tipping points from which, once they were crossed, there would likely be no return. We knew that it was possible to prevent this catastrophe in the form of vast cuts to emissions and a global transition to renewable energy. Plans for such a transition have been mapped out in detail by scientists like Marc Jacobson²⁹ and David MacKay,³⁰ and the consequences of not making this transition have been well-documented. Given all the evidence for the scope of the crisis and the existence of workable solutions, we felt that once we communicated this information to the public, it would be only a matter of time before people got on board with our message and began to support the policies and actions that would prevent such a catastrophic outcome.

The public, however, did not quite seem to get our message. That is partly why several hundred thousand people took to the streets of New York City during the 2014 United Nations Climate Summit. In the face of indifference from the public and inaction on the part of world leaders, it seemed that nothing less than a global movement for climate action would be necessary to inspire the change that was needed to mitigate global warming. The “People’s Climate March” was a collaboration amongst a wide array of civil society organizations (including 350.org and Avaaz.org) and was geared toward inclusivity. Its slogan was, “To change everything, we need everyone.” In addition to starting a movement, it’s purpose was to get as many people onto the streets as possible in order to send a message to the United Nations, and to the world, that the time for action is now.

²⁸ I discuss my work with Toronto350.org in greater detail in Chapter 3.

²⁹ Mark Z. Jacobson, and Mark A. Delucchi, "A Path to Sustainable Energy by 2030," *Scientific American* 301, no. 5 (2009): 58-65, accessed on August 4, 2017, *Business Source Complete*, EBSCOhost.

³⁰ David MacKay, *Sustainable Energy - Without the Hot Air* (UIT Cambridge, 2008).

Margaret Mead is famously quoted as saying, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” These words have been a rallying cry for activists since 1984 when Sommers and Dineen published *Curing Nuclear Madness: A New Age Prescription for Personal Action*, wherein the quote first appears. But perhaps Mead was misquoted, as some claim, or perhaps there was never any clout behind her words, because as climate change has taken center stage in worldwide discussions about environmental policy, there has been a growing perception that widespread consensus is necessary to address it. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*,³¹ the book by journalist-activist Naomi Klein, even goes so far as to suggest that we need an entirely new global system to solve the climate crisis. When did solving climate change come to be about more than just electric cars and carbon taxes? When did it start demanding a global movement and systemic change? To paraphrase the People’s Climate March, when did we start needing everyone to change everything?

The notion that system change will be necessary to address capitalism has become a guiding tenet amongst certain streams of the climate movement.³² For some, it is a question of the incommensurability of neoliberal capitalism with the goals of sustainability. For others, it is about the need for solutions to climate change that will also address the social injustices underlying it, such as, the inequitable distribution of causes and consequences, respectively, between rich and poor parts of the world. If there was ever a time that reducing carbon emissions was believed to be the only important factor in addressing climate change, this belief has certainly been taken to task. The rise of discourses of “climate justice”³³ have added additional

³¹ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

³² I discuss this issue further in Chapter 2.

³³ Patrick Bond, *Politics of Climate Justice: Paralysis Above, Movement Below* (Cape Town: University of Kwa Zulu Natal Press, 2012).

layers of social analysis to carbon-focused solutions by demonstrating how climate change intersects with various forms of social injustice, including, the exploitation of indigenous lands and the peoples who inhabit them. Activist calls for carbon mitigation have thus begun to incorporate discourses of social change and values of “just sustainability” into their rhetoric.³⁴

At the same time as climate activism has evolved toward aspirations for an inclusive and justice-oriented global movement, rising global emissions have made staying within the science-advised limit of two degrees of warming seem like an increasingly improbable outcome. The commitments of the signatories of the landmark Paris Climate Agreement, for instance, amount to aggregate global emissions that would bring the world well above the two degree threshold for safe warming.³⁵ Thus we are likely to be facing an entirely different world in the next few decades than that to which we have grown accustomed in the past 10,000 years of the Holocene.

Given that the consequences of climate change are inevitable (and in many cases have already begun to have an impact) it seems more important than ever to consider what form the global civil society response to climate change might take in terms of its social imaginations. Whether or not it has ever been the case that a small group of committed individuals can change the world, it is increasingly apparent that, in the age of the Anthropocene, changing the world is not enough. Human beings have already altered the Earth’s systems beyond recuperation. We must instead begin to change ourselves, to challenge the current configurations in which we inhabit this planet, and to find ways to continue our existence as a species that are both just and sustainable.

³⁴ Julian Agyeman, Robert Doyle Bullard, and Bob Evans, eds, *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World* (MIT press, 2003).

³⁵ William Yardley, and Alexandra Zavis, “Paris Climate Summit Could Bring Historic Deal on Emissions, but Likely Won’t Halt Climate Change,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 2015, accessed July 7, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/science/la-fg-sej-paris-climate-conference-20151129-story.html>.

Creating more sustainable social configurations has traditionally been thought of as a means to an end in the form of preventing catastrophic climate change and perhaps even creating a more just and equitable world. But as the dominant climate change discourse shifts from one of prevention to one of adaptation, we must turn to other motivations for initiating social change, and ones that are not purely rooted in crisis mitigation or world-saving.

...and Losing It

Why did you become a climate activist? I asked him, as if anticipating I would be writing a thesis on that very subject four years later. He looked bemused at the question and even a bit sheepish. *Same reason as everybody else, I guess, he said. ...To try and save the world.*

As it turns out, saving the world entails a lot of meetings. Also, flyering, posterizing, rallying, lobbying, petitioning, planning, and, somehow, even more meetings. After that first meeting with 350, it wasn't long before my whole world was activism. Just about every minute of my life outside of work was spent doing something with or for the climate cause. I started as a volunteer and soon I was in charge of organizing events and leading teams of my own volunteers. It was the kind of work I wished I could get paid for – engaging, fulfilling, plenty of room for growth. I felt like I was contributing something of value to the world. I no longer felt restless and without purpose. I was part of a community that shared my concerns. I felt accepted and needed – like I was changing more than just lightbulbs.

But the feeling of elation didn't last.

Joining the cause, it seemed, came at a cost. It became difficult to talk to people outside of the movement. I couldn't relate to anyone who wasn't deeply engaged with these issues in the same way as I was. I resented anybody who wasn't making climate change their top priority. Over time, what had initially filled me with joy and fulfillment began to elicit anger at and a

sense of isolation from the rest of society. I had found a place in one world but lost my sense of belonging in another. Once again, I started to feel restless. I was also exhausted.

“Burnout” is a common ailment amongst activist communities. It’s a feeling of overwhelming exasperation and fatigue that is at least partially responsible for the revolving door of new recruits. Activism can be utterly thankless work. At the same time, it requires complete devotion. The people who stick with it have to find a way to manage the constant drain of trying to make the world more in line with their ideals and, at the same time, cope with the reality of living in a world that seems unshakably committed to the status quo. The constant rejection and sense of alienation from the rest of society can send a person spiraling into despair faster than you can say “cruel optimism.”³⁶

After so many late nights and so many doors slammed in my face, I began to feel “the burn.” I joined the cause to gain a sense of purpose. But I never realized how attached I had become to the idea of change.

So when he told me he wanted to save the world just like “everyone else” in the movement, I started to feel that everyone else did not include me. It wasn’t that I didn’t believe in the cause. It’s just that the cause wasn’t enough for me. When I started to consider seriously what success for the movement looked like, the world I envisioned looked very much the same as it was. There would still be war and poverty and oppression. There would still be patriarchy and the prison industrial complex.

And so it goes, less than a year after diving head first into activism I began to fall out of love. I started to feel that I was sacrificing my own development and well-being for my ideals.

At the same time, working at a department store and seeing all those old lightbulbs and plastic

³⁶ “A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing.” In this case, the obstructive desire was changing the world. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

casings from thousands upon millions of individually-wrapped clothing and accessories get sent to the landfill every day made every moment I spent in the movement feel evermore futile.

Trying to navigate these two worlds – the one in which climate change was everything and the one in which it wasn't – became impossible for me. I felt I had to choose, one or the other.

When I think about my decision to take a break from activism at that time, I worry about how easy it was for me to leave. As swiftly as I had joined the movement, I was out. I stopped attending meetings, stopped answering emails, and returned to my previous existence.

I did what I could to allay the ever-present sense of restlessness: TV, movies, parties, sports, junk food, health food, work, meditation, friends, exercise, hobbies – whatever it took to achieve that sense of everything being all right.

Ultimately, I left activism because I didn't have to keep fighting the good fight. At the end of the day, I had a choice. To be or not to be the change? That is the question. I could come up with a million reasons why I left. People are great at rationalizing their actions.

But no good reason would be good enough to justify my desire, not only to abandon the movement, but to not have to care anymore about problems like climate change. It would only serve to demonstrate how much easier it was for me to justify my departure from, rather than try to inhabit, a world in which climate change is everything, when every fiber of my being wanted to return to a world in which it wasn't.

* * *

What I have tried to do with this introductory chapter is, first, to situate this thesis within academic discussions about the role of the imagination in creating social change; second, to provide background on the developments and debates in climate activism which have influenced this research; and, third, to use personal narration to reveal my own history with activism as well

as the experiences and world views that shaped my positionality. By fleshing out some of the thoughts and feelings interwoven throughout my own journey with climate activism, I tried to show how thinking through climate change opens up new imaginary vistas in terms of how we come to understand our place and purpose in the world. In chapter three, I examine these vistas in terms of the climate movement more broadly in and through my conversations with Toronto activists. In the next chapter, I provide an in-depth discussion of the research process I undertook in terms of how I went about collecting and analyzing my ethnographic data and the results of this process.

The capacity to imagine alternatives to current configurations is without a doubt integral to the development of possibilities for sustainability in the age of the Anthropocene. To engage with climate change is to open up new pathways of thought as to how the world works and our individual and collective roles in shaping it. Not only does climate change open up new imaginary vistas in the minds of individuals, it also creates new forms of social connection that often transcend locality. Aspirations for a global climate movement, supported by universalizing scientific and political discourses, have brought climate activism beyond its original obsession with carbon mitigation to include considerations of the possibilities of social change in achieving climate sustainability. As we begin to pass the tipping points set out by scientists, now more than ever, the role of the climate movement in mitigating global warming is as much about carbon emissions as it is about creating the kind of world in which environmental sustainability and social welfare are mutually-constitutive rather than competing aims.

Epilogue

As it turned out, I couldn't stay away from the movement forever, and eventually I found myself back there – back in the dimly lit meeting rooms at seven o'clock on a Tuesday night; back at the

tables surrounded by idealists who would probably rather be nowhere else; back on the pavement putting up flyers; back to the crowded halls of rabble-rousers intent on getting their message across to jaded politicians who likely would rather be anywhere else; back in the warm embrace of a woman who hasn't had a weekend off in 40 years because "the climate villains don't take a day off" and neither can she; back to the mixers, the potlucks, the PowerPoint presentations, the film screenings, the friendly hellos and I-haven't-seen-you-in-a-while's; back to the sense of purpose and the support of community; back to caring; back to hoping; back to believing that things can change and for the better.

I was back, but this time, I had a camera and a notepad. I was a researcher.

I only hoped that maybe this time I could find the answers I began looking for three years prior when I first stumbled, green and bug-eyed, into that empty classroom on that unseasonably warm October evening. Maybe this time, I thought, things will be different. Maybe there is a happy medium between being the change and not being the change. Maybe there is nothing I have to do or say or think or create. Maybe, for a few months, it will be enough to just be here, present, taking it all in...

And then, in a few months my research will be over. I'll be out of the movement and back to worrying about anything but climate change – about the traffic on a Saturday morning; about not doing enough with my life; about dating the wrong person; about never owning my own home; about whether I want to have children or whether I should get my PhD.

And after all that worrying, maybe I'll find a way back to a previous time in my life, decades ago, when I was blissfully unaware of what the future held in store. And maybe then I'll manage to forget – even for a moment – that climate change is real, and I'll feel a temporary wave of relief...

And if I can't forget, I'll simply reminisce and try to imagine what it felt like to live in a time when the existential restlessness was a reaction to the monotony of modernity and not a science-backed fear for the future of humanity.

Chapter 2

Data Collection and Analysis

In this chapter I outline the methodology I employed in conducting my field research and the process by which I organized my data into an explanatory schema. The ethnographic component of my data collection process entailed approximately five months of fieldwork in which I conducted formal and informal interviews with activists, attended and participated in meetings and events, and took notes on my observations. Here, I explain how I employed the code-sorting method³⁷ to analyze this data and devise a schema for understanding climate activism in terms of its key organizing principles. The primary data I used for the code-sorting analysis were the transcriptions of nine, one-on-one interviews with activists I conducted, which ranged from 45 – 90 minutes, as well as my field notes, which included transcriptions from some of the events I attended (and in some cases filmed) and my general observations over the course of the five months. After coding all of this data, I amassed several hundred passages that I then sorted into categories. The categories represented different aspects of the strategies and imaginations that activists deploy to initiate social change. From the categories, I extracted four organizing principles – crisis mitigation, social change, individual agency and collective organizing. These four principles and the different ways in which they are valued in part determine which strategies activists choose. In Chapter 3, I discuss how values influence the different strategies of activists in more detail through a case study comparison of Toronto climate activists. Here, I explore how I derived these four principles and how they function together to undergird different strategies.

³⁷ Foss, Sonja K. and Waters, William. *Destination Dissertation: A Traveler's Guide to a Done Dissertation*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

Data Collection

I chose Toronto, Ontario as the research setting for this study because of its reputation as a major urban center for environmentalism, its proximity to McMaster University, and my previous ties to the activist communities there. My familiarity with environmental activism in Toronto dates back to 2013 when I began doing climate activist work upon graduating from the University of Toronto. I have lived in Toronto for much of my life, and I am familiar with the local issues, politics and culture of environmentalism that thrives in many parts of the city. Before I began this study, I had ties to several local climate action groups, including, Toronto350.org, Climate Fast, and Greenpeace.

Toronto boasts a relatively high engagement with environmental issues in both the public and private sectors. Such engagement is not only evinced by activists but also citizens, entrepreneurs, businesses and the municipal government. At the time I conducted this ethnography, the City Council was nearing the end of a two-year study called TransformTO, in which it underwent consultations with scientists, civil society groups, businesses and citizens on how the city ought to respond to the climate crisis. In the spring of 2017, TransformTO released a climate action plan³⁸ aimed at reducing the city's greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050. The plan was voted into effect by the city council shortly thereafter.³⁹ It received widespread support and contributions from dozens of community groups, all deeply invested in its success. Many of these groups are part of the Toronto Climate Action Network, which helps to coordinate the activities of activists and community leaders all around the city working to address climate change.

³⁸ Chief Corporate Officer, *TransformTO: Climate Action for a Healthy, Equitable and Prosperous Toronto - Report #2 - The Pathway to a Low Carbon Future*, April 20, 2017, Report for Action, accessed on August 4, 2017, <https://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=9e60402b5782f410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>.

³⁹ John Rietl, "Toronto climate change plan TransformTO passes 1st test at city hall," *CBC News*, July 4 2017, accessed July 26, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/transformto-debate-1.4189886>.

I began my fieldwork by getting in touch with the groups and individuals I had worked with in the past, and they helped me get in touch with the People's Climate Movement (PCM). I was interested in the work of the PCM, specifically, because the group formed as a direct result of the People's Climate March, the massive mobilization that occurred in New York City during the 2014 United Nations Climate Summit. The People's Climate March was collaboration amongst groups working to build a global climate movement. I was interested to see how that strategy had unfolded after the march in the form of the Toronto PCM.

It made sense to focus on a particular group in conducting my research because a group could provide pre-authorized consent for my participation in their meetings while providing me with insider information. After tracking down the PCM, I introduced myself and told them about my study. They were very receptive and enthusiastically welcomed me into their community. They helped me gain access to news and events and connected me to other climate groups and networks, including the Toronto Climate Action Network, of which the PCM is a member.

My principle methods included interviews, participant observation and naturalistic observation. I conducted nine one-on-one interviews with climate activists, six of which were with members of the People's Climate Movement, the rest of which were with activists from other groups. Almost all of the interviewees were members of more than one group, including other climate action groups, community groups, political groups, private organizations, networks, and so on. Many were from Toronto but some were from other parts of Ontario, Canada and the world. In addition to the activists I interviewed, I spoke informally with dozens of individuals and attended dozens of events including planning meetings, five town halls, several rallies, marches, lectures, fundraisers, a bus tour and multiple film screenings, some of which I helped to organize or conduct. When I was unable to obtain prior informed consent, I

conducted myself as a silent observer and, if I wished to speak to somebody whom I did not know, I always introduced myself as a researcher and explained the nature of my study. I filmed many of the public events I attended, as well as eight of the nine interviews, and took photographs whenever possible. I also took meticulous field notes, which I digitized along with the transcriptions of all of my interviews. In the next section, I discuss the process by which I organized and analyzed this data.

Data Analysis

Mode of Analysis

Using the code-sorting method of analysis, I was able to incorporate most of my qualitative data in a semi-systematic way. The process entailed coding salient passages in my notes and transcriptions, grouping similarly-coded passages together, and then arranging the codes to create an explanatory schema. The process of coding and sorting was essentially intuitive. I looked for passages that in some way revealed how activists imagine and strategize social change as it pertains to solving the climate crisis. I hoped to create a schema that would be relevant to climate activism and the global climate movement more generally. My analysis was also informed by research on this topic that I conducted during the course-work phase in the first year of my program. Here I describe the process by which I derived the schema and its relevance in understanding and conceptualizing climate activism.

Units of Analysis

I began the process of coding my data by determining my units of analysis. These were statements that expressed or revealed a strategy or imagination (or a constitutive element of such) concerning climate change and its solutions. A strategy was defined as “a careful plan or

method for achieving a particular goal usually over a long period of time.”⁴⁰ The term strategy encompasses a broad spectrum of tactics, methods and goals which act as constituent elements of complex plans carried out over significant periods of time. Imaginations are slightly more complicated to operationalize, and I provide more insight into my use of this concept in other chapters. For the purposes of the explanatory schema, I define an imagination broadly as “a creation of the mind”⁴¹ which can include perceptions, dreams, ideologies, and their constituent elements, as well as other aspects of the psychological, as they relate to the strategies and goals of climate activism.

Coding Process

Upon digitizing my data, I identified salient quotes and passages, coded them, and then combined like codes together using the standard of reasonable inference. In general, the process was an intuitive one. I sorted codes based on perceived conceptual and thematic similarities, structuring them as direct or indirect responses to my research question. As an example, the code, “fear won’t motivate change,” included activist statements such as, “...I want to mention this idea of inspiring action instead of fear mongering, because I think we’ve learned...that moving from a place of fear is never effective,”⁴² and, “...we have to create paradigms of positive psychology, empowering people with autonomy, and helping them to find their own way and their own solutions.”⁴³ Some codes, such as, “build coalitions,” “pressure politicians,” and “public education,” reflect well-known strategies of activism. Others, such as “fear won’t

⁴⁰ “Definition of strategy,” *Merriam-Webster*, accessed July 3, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/strategy>.

⁴¹ “Definition of imagination,” *Miriam-Webster*, accessed July 3, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imagination>.

⁴² Halyna, interview by author, Toronto, December 23, 2017.

⁴³ Vince, interview by author, Toronto, November 18, 2017.

motivate change,” and “back to our roots,” are more indicative of activist imaginations and more specific to the climate activists I interviewed. In Table 1 (see below), I list all 61 codes.

Table 1: Results of Coding

| | |
|---|--|
| Fear won't motivate change | Reach new publics |
| Not guilting people into things | Film as public engagement |
| Motivation for change must come from within | Public education |
| Most people care | Provide bi-partisan discussion |
| Expose people to broader picture | Mass demonstrations |
| Back to our roots | Get climate change onto the political agenda |
| Live in line with own values | Educate politicians |
| Make good personal choices | Pressure politicians |
| Collective power of individual actions | Self-education |
| Reduce consumption | Post-election waiting period |
| Facilitate convergence of movements | Strategic campaigning |
| Work together | Critical thinking |
| Build a network | Virtual communities |
| Build coalitions | Community building |
| Connect with other groups | Increase civic engagement |
| Come together as a movement | Sustainability is everything |
| Engage with different viewpoints | Reform political system |
| Integrate multiple issues | Systems approaches |
| Bring climate change lens to other groups' work | Raising money |
| Climate change is at the heart of multiple issues | Social entrepreneurship |
| Remain non-partisan | Renewable energy |
| Planning meetings | Green urban infrastructure |
| Informal group structure | Empower people |
| Establish clear objectives | Snowflake model |
| Democratic decision-making | Direct action |
| De-stigmatize climate change | Increase political engagement |
| Movement needs all kinds of people | Capitalism vs. climate |
| Stand together | Fight fossil fuel companies |
| Facilitate conversation | We are in a crisis |
| Emotional connections | Fight international trade deals |
| Social media campaigns | |

Initial Code Sort

Once I had established the codes, I attempted to sort them into an explanatory schema. This presented some challenges. The codes were difficult to sort because there was a great deal of conceptual overlap. They also lacked a certain equivalence. Some, such as, “come together as a movement,” represented complex, higher order strategies of climate activism, while others, such as “connect with other groups,” seemed to stand for constituent elements of more complex strategies. Furthermore, because I defined my units of analysis quite broadly, the codes referred to a multiplicity of elements of activist strategies and imaginations. Ultimately, as before, I employed an intuitive process to sort the codes, and I ended up with the ten categories seen below. Each represents a higher order strategy or imagination employed by climate activists in their advocacy work and comprises some of the constitutive elements. Several of the codes – including, “raising money,” “critical thinking,” “establish clear objectives” and “planning meetings” – were omitted from the sorting at this stage because they were too vague to be associated with any one of the ten categories or so general as to be applicable to all.

Table 2: Results of Initial Code Sort

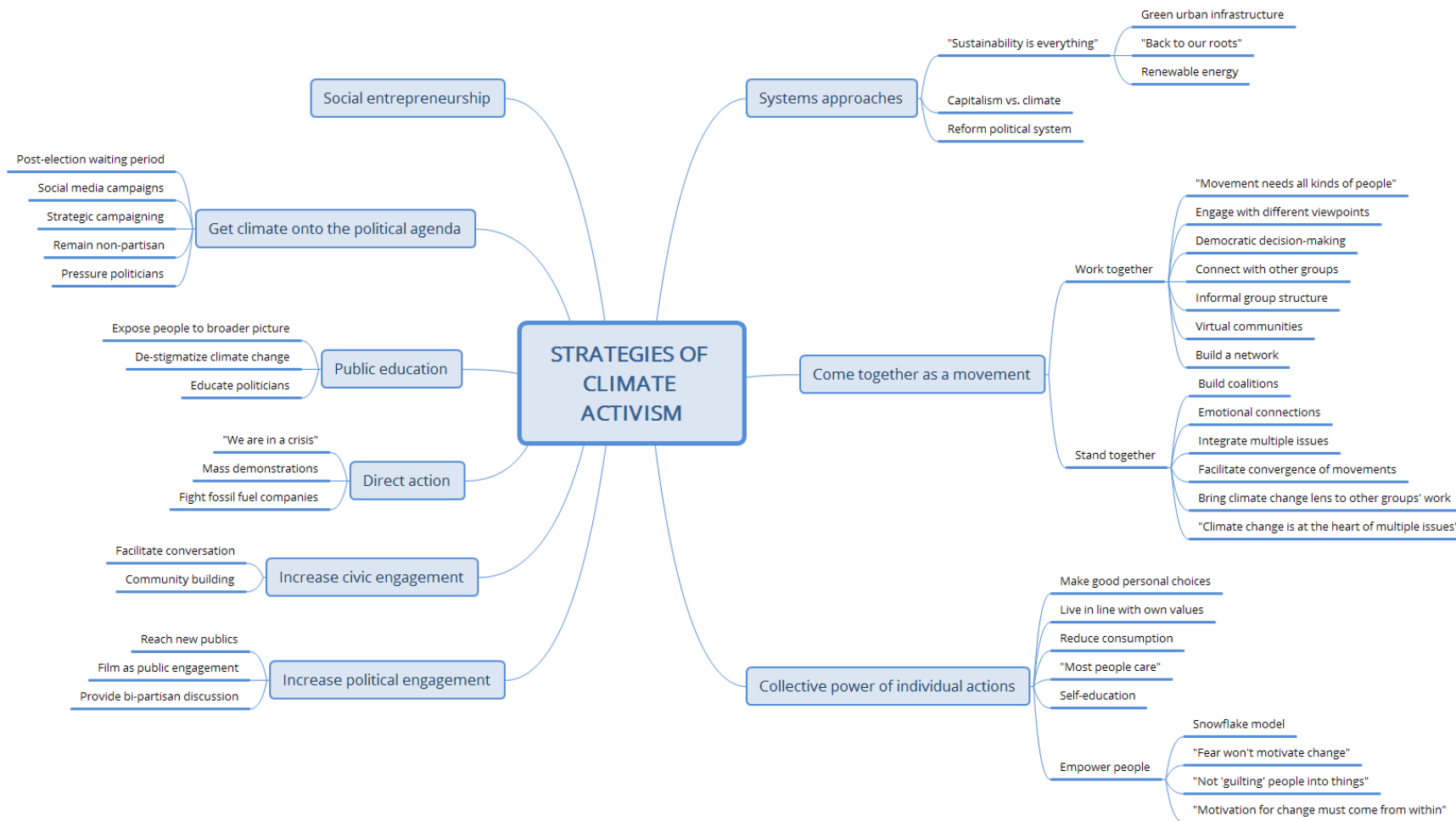
| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| MOVEMENT BUILDING | Build a network “Movement needs all kinds of people” Mass demonstrations Stand together Build coalitions Work together Virtual communities | Come together as a movement Connect with other groups Bring climate change lens to other groups’ work Facilitate convergence of movements Engage with different viewpoints |
| STRATEGIC CAMPAIGNING | Strategic campaigning Increase political engagement Social media campaigns Reform political system Reach new publics Fight international trade deals Green urban infrastructure | Get climate change on the political agenda Pressure politicians Post-election waiting period Remain non-partisan Film as public engagement |
| DIRECT ACTION | Direct action “We are in a crisis” | |
| EDUCATION | Public education Educate politicians Expose people to broader picture Provide bi-partisan discussion Self-education | |
| COMMUNITY ORGANIZING | Community building Systems approaches Emotional connections | |
| PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT | Empower people “Snowflake model” Increase civic engagement Facilitate conversation De-stigmatize climate change | |
| INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR CHANGE | Make good personal choices “Motivation for change must come from within” Live in line with own values | “Most people care” Collective power of individual actions |
| POSITIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS | Democratic decision-making “Not ‘guilting’ people into things” Informal group structure | |
| SUSTAINABILITY | Fight fossil fuel companies “Back to our roots” Capitalism vs. climate “Sustainability is everything” | Renewable energy Reduce consumption Social entrepreneurship |
| STRATEGIC FRAMING | “Fear won’t motivate change” Integrate multiple issues “Climate change is at the heart of multiple issues” | |

Flow Chart

In sorting the codes into a flow chart (see Figure 1 below) I was able to depict the hierarchical relationships between them as well as eliminate the need for additional titles (as in the ones I added during the initial code sort) and exclusively use the codes themselves for the category titles. Framing the higher-up categories more as strategies than imaginations, I was able to afford them a certain equivalency. Their branches represent a broad spectrum of the different components of strategies, such as, tools and tactics, motivations and beliefs, as well as goals and desires. Focusing on strategies at the higher level while leaving the lower-order elements quite broad provides a more holistic picture of what constitutes a strategy than would choosing just one element to focus on, such as tactics or beliefs.

One noteworthy discrepancy in the flow chart is that not all the categories have subcategories and some have more than others. I attribute this to the selective nature of my data, which is taken from a particular subset of Toronto-based climate activists and is biased toward the questions that were most interesting to me when I collected my data. A similar study of climate activists conducted by a different researcher would obviously have yielded a different chart. However, there would likely be some overlap, as the strategies I chose also reflect my observations of climate activism more broadly. For instance, any chart on climate activism would likely include strategies like, “public education,” “direct action,” and “get climate onto the political agenda,” though there might be some discrepancy in the titles (e.g., “come together as a movement” could also be titled, “build a movement” or “movement-building”).

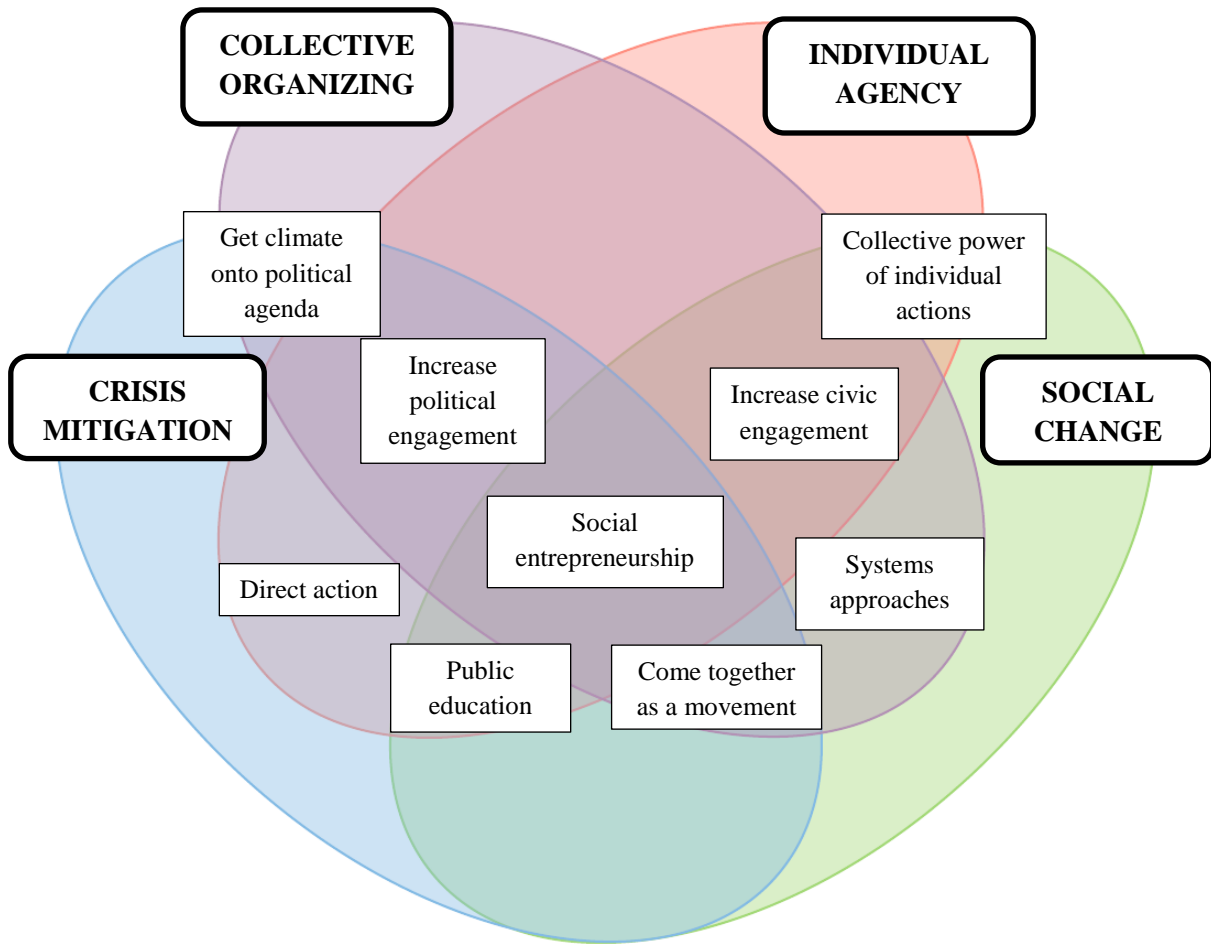
Figure 1: Flow Chart



Venn Diagram

After making the flow chart I still felt I could do more to analyze how the different strategies of climate activism are interrelated while also making my schema more applicable to other contexts. I sorted and re-sorted my codes numerous times, looking for common underlying principles and arranging the codes along different continuums according to which codes were most closely related and which were most divergent. This analysis elicited four drivers that seemed to apply in one combination or another to all of the strategies I identified. I labelled the four drivers: *crisis mitigation*, *social change*, *collective organizing*, and *individual agency*. I chose to represent them as a Venn diagram (see Figure 2 below) because of its usefulness in displaying conceptual overlap. Each of the four chambers of the diagram represents a different driver, and each strategy, depending on the relative importance it places on each of the drivers, is located in one of the overlapping sections. Below, I explain my reasoning in selecting these drivers, which I ultimately conceptualize as values, and I offer some examples of how they relate to various strategies of climate activists.

Figure 2: Venn Diagram



Four drivers of climate activism

My selection of these four drivers – crisis mitigation, social change, collective organizing, and individual agency – is based on my conversations with and observations of activists, as well as prior research into discussions and debates on climate activism in the scholarly literature and beyond. These drivers encompass four key principles that motivate and frame how activists select, design and implement strategies for addressing climate change. The relative importance activists placed on each of the drivers contributes to determinations around which strategies to employ, such as, advocating for climate-friendly policies, educating fellow citizens on the climate issue, or promoting civic participation in their communities.

The concept of crisis mitigation refers to the sense in which activists frame climate change as an urgent crisis and their activism as a way to prevent a catastrophe. Such framings are rooted in scientific discourses that posit what constitutes a safe climate and assess current levels of greenhouse gas emissions as insufficient to keep global warming at safe levels. Activist responses to climate change that foreground the crisis of rising temperatures take scientific warnings literally and tend to employ strategies that will entail the most direct route to decreasing the greenhouse warming effect. To be sure, all climate activists take seriously the science of climate, but not all activists engage with the need for mitigation in the same way or to the same degree. While crisis mitigation is rooted in a rhetoric of urgency, social change is more targeted toward addressing systemic and root causes. Activist strategies that prioritize root causes of climate change target the social, political and economic factors that contribute to climate change, such as, systems that rely on endless economic growth and unbridled consumption while contributing to sweeping disparities between rich and poor. In the literature,

crisis mitigation and social change are sometimes figured as different streams of the climate movement.^{44,45,46}

Collective organizing refers to the notion that concerted collaboration amongst activists is essential to addressing climate change. It undergirds strategies like movement-building and strategic campaigning. Individual agency, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of the individual in addressing the climate crisis and lends itself to strategies rooted in personal will and autonomy. The importance of collective organizing in activist strategies has been well-documented in the literature. Less discussed is the concept of individual agency and the question of what role it could or should play in the advancement of climate sustainability agendas.⁴⁷ The relative merits of individual and collective climate solutions have stimulated much debate. Strong proponents of collective organizing have tended to downplay individual efforts like reducing one's carbon footprint, while others have argued that individual agency is an untapped resource in the struggle to increase the instance of climate-friendly actions and attitudes amongst the general public. Increasingly, collective organizing and individual agency are understood as complementary, rather than oppositional, components in addressing climate change.⁴⁸ As one activist put it, "We used to be dismissive about the "ride-your-bike" narrative and personalized

⁴⁴ Verity Burgmann, and Hans A. Baer, *Climate Politics and the Climate Movement in Australia* (Melbourne University Press, 2012).

⁴⁵ Hans A. Baer, and Merrill Singer, *The Anthropology of Climate Change: An Integrated Critical Perspective* (Routledge, 2014).

⁴⁶ Baer, Hans A., "The International Climate Justice Movement: A Comparison with the Australian Climate Movement," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (2011): 256-260, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1757-6547.2011.00128.x>.

⁴⁷ Crate and Nuttall, *Anthropology and Climate change*, 2016.

⁴⁸ Aiken, Gerald Taylor, Lucie Middlemiss, Susannah Sallu, and Richard Hauxwell-Baldwin, "Researching Climate Change and Community in Neoliberal Contexts: An Emerging Critical Approach," *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 8, no. 4 (2017): 1-14, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/wcc.463>.

action, but we are actually looking at a continuum. People who take personal actions are more motivated down the road.”⁴⁹⁵⁰

Although these four drivers of climate activism – crisis mitigation, social change, collective organizing, and individual agency – have historically been pitted against one another by both scholars and activists, I conceptualize them in the Venn diagram as intersecting, constitutive elements of climate activism. I understand them not so much as competing streams but as underlying values that may come into conflict but are ultimately part of an ongoing negotiation between highly valued aims. In this sense, it is the limitations of certain strategies – not the conflicting values of activists – that force activists to prioritize certain goals and methods over others. I refer to these four drivers as values because they reflect the “principles or standards of behavior” by which climate activists determine what is “important in life” and in their advocacy work.⁵¹ Understanding how these and other values figure into activist strategies and imaginations is an important path to developing more effective avenues of designing and inspiring solutions to the climate crisis.

Graphing the four values

When I first attempted to graphically depict these values, I placed crisis mitigation and social change at opposite ends of a spectrum, and then did the same with collective organizing and individual agency, locating the two spectrums as the X and Y axes on a scatterplot. The problem with this framework is that it only allows for a limited subset of combinations (i.e., crisis

⁴⁹ Emmay Mah, “A Different Shade of Green: The New Face of the Climate Change Movement,” (presentation, University of Toronto, March 8, 2017).

⁵⁰ Much research in the social sciences supports this hypothesis. See Margaret M. Willis, and Juliet B. Schor, “Does Changing a Light Bulb Lead to Changing the World? Political Action and the Conscious Consumer,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 644, Communication, Consumers, and Citizens: Revisiting the Politics of Consumption (November 2012): 160-190, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23316148>.

⁵¹ “Value,” *Oxford Living Dictionaries*, accessed August 10, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/value>.

mitigation *and* collective organizing, or social change *and* individual agency). What I hoped to demonstrate with the Venn diagram is that these four values can intersect in any combination as the principle drivers of a particular strategy. Here I provide more detail on some of the higher-order strategies I devised in the flow chart and offer more context on the reasoning behind their locations in the various chambers of the diagram.

As a first example, in the diagram I locate “direct action” at the intersection of crisis mitigation and individual agency. Though direct actions can be organized collectively (as in the context of mass mobilizations and coordinated direct actions) and also directed toward the end goal of social change, they are primarily driven by the agency of individuals in the context of extreme and urgent circumstances (even mass mobilizations are directly dependent on the agency of the individuals who choose to show up to the demonstration). Direct action refers to those strategies in which activists put their own bodies on the line for the purposes of achieving immediate results, such as media attention and/or the obstruction of corporate or government activities. In the case of climate activism this could entail, for instance, shutting off a pipeline valve and then chaining oneself to the valve so that it cannot be turned on again.

This tactic was employed by U.S. activists on October 11, 2016 to disrupt the flow of crude oil from the Alberta oil sands to U.S. markets. In a coordinated effort spanning four states, four individuals “were arrested after they cut padlocks and chains and entered remote flow stations to turn off valves in an attempt to stop crude moving through lines that carry as much as 15 percent of daily U.S. oil consumption.”⁵² The action took several months of planning and succeeded in disrupting the flow of millions of barrels of crude oil. “We are acting in response to this catastrophe we are facing,” said a spokesperson for the group in reference to climate change.

⁵² Nia Williams, “Activists disrupt key Canada-U.S. oil pipelines,” *Reuters*, October 12, 2016, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-canada-pipelines-idUSKCN12B26O>.

The sense of desperate times demanding desperate measures is palpable here, and such measures are invoked when faith in traditional mechanisms of civic participation to address an immediate crisis has been lost.

The strategy of “systems approaches” offers a counterpoint to direct action. Located at the nexus of social change and collective organizing, systems approaches necessarily entail collectively-organized efforts aimed at precipitating a more permanent and systemic kind of change. For example, they might entail organizing to achieve more sustainable infrastructure in a city or neighbourhood, such as green spaces, retrofits or accessible transit. They could also include organized efforts aimed at policy changes or political reforms like proportional representation and participatory budgeting. In some cases, they encompass beliefs that capitalism is inherently antithetical to climate sustainability and a new economic system will be necessary in achieving it. These strategies are collectivist because they rely on the coordination and compliance of many groups and individuals, and they entail social change in the sense that in order to be effective they require more than just one-time measures but new social norms as well.

Moving into the areas where three or more values overlap, I have placed “increase civic engagement” at the intersection of social change, collective organizing and individual agency. Compared with system change, I have added this extra layer of motivation – individual agency – to account for how this strategy aims to build a society of informed and engaged individuals. One of the main tactics associated with civic engagement, in addition to consciousness raising efforts, is community building. This entails bringing people together in a sustained manner toward the goal of building conscientious collectives. Here I distinguish “increase civic engagement” from the strategy of “increase political engagement,” which is more concerned with crisis mitigation than social change. The former includes actions meant to engage people in

public and community life and create new social norms, while the latter aims to engage people in politics, often to achieve a critical mass at the polls during an important election or policy decision. This latter effort is not so much about changing social conventions but achieving immediate results in response to a crisis via the political system.

In the very centre of the diagram, at the intersection of all four values, I have placed “social entrepreneurship.” This is not to say that social entrepreneurship is the best tactic for achieving climate sustainability. Rather, it is the category that best exemplifies how the four values can all function together. Social entrepreneurship, as a business enterprise, is not usually associated with activism. But I conceptualize it as an activist strategy in this analysis because of how it has come to be used by activists as a tool for social and environmental justice goals. As a commercial enterprise, entrepreneurship is rooted in a belief in the power of individual agency to effect change. But, it relies on collective organizing in the way it seeks to bring different groups of people together – technical experts, business owners, corporations, civil servants, activists, community members and everyday citizens – in the service of societal improvement goals. In this sense it is also a strategy of social change because by acting in and through entrenched political-economic systems it also seeks to redesign these systems and create new norms of socially-conscious commercial enterprise. Acting via current systems, social entrepreneurship also takes a relatively direct route toward addressing climate sustainability goals by circumventing the need for critical-mass building or political-economic restructuring to achieve desired outcomes as quickly as possible.

To reiterate an earlier point, the four values described here are not mutually exclusive, and most climate activist strategies will aim to incorporate all four. The point is that some traditional movement strategies may be necessitating the prioritization of one value over another

based on the limitations of their constituent goals and methods. Overall, the point is not to categorize strategies as better or worse per se, but to show how different strategies are more conducive to the realization of certain values over others and ultimately to ask what this understanding might mean for how future strategies are designed and implemented.

Caveats concerning this analysis

Many of the caveats concerning this analysis have already been mentioned. Most obvious are that I did not use a random sampling of activists and my codes and categories were derived intuitively and lack discrete boundaries. It is also notable that two of the overlapping chambers – the nexus of crisis mitigation and social change and that of collective organizing and individual agency – have been left empty, along with each of the for single-value chambers. I considered blackening these chambers (as is the convention with Venn diagrams), but instead I left them open for a few reasons. The first is that there may be strategies that fit in those two areas that I have not encountered in this study. I also felt that constituent elements of certain strategies could fill those spaces, such as beliefs or tactics reflecting singular values. Ultimately, I left them open to resist narrowing this analysis to a binary point of view. I chose the Venn diagram over the Euler diagram for this reason, though the latter would have eliminated the need for these empty overlapping chambers. My hope is that we might begin to move away from the either/or-type thinking that is, in my view, creating unnecessary divisions amongst activists.

Discussion

Climate activists represent a multiplicity of diverse and divergent goals, beliefs, motivations and constituencies. Attempting to incorporate all of this diversity into an explanatory schema is reflects the challenging of bringing diverse activists together into a cohesive movement. “To change everything, we need everyone,” was the slogan of the People’s Climate March. But

climate activists have thus far struggled to develop a coherent set of principles and goals. This has led some to question whether the climate movement is best thought of as a movement at all, or whether it demands some other designation.

The climate movement is not a wave... it's like little drops. Everybody's working in one area, but we are not visible to the public. The public doesn't understand what we [are talking] about...because we work in our silos. Everybody's in his own sphere. ... We are little drops of water, but this is not a movement.⁵³

Many of the traditional ways of conceptualizing social movements no longer seem relevant in the digital age when movements can exist entirely online, and mobilizations can spring up and dissipate in the blink of an eye. The diffuse and transient nature of contemporary social movements has led scholars to conceptualize them as networks rather than groups^{54,55} and, more recently, as assemblages rather than systems.^{56,57,58} But even the concept of an assemblage, which highlights the contingency and dynamism of networked social systems, seems too concrete to adequately describe the climate movement. The movement often seems to exist primarily as a sort of “imagined community” as opposed to a coherent set of linked actors.

At the beginning of this analysis, I mentioned that the data analysis method is not particularly conducive to the exploration of activist imaginations but is perhaps better suited to understanding their strategies. Ultimately, what I think I have done with this analysis is to show how comparing and contrasting activist strategies can actually be a way to shed some light on the

⁵³ “Anonymous,” interview by author, Toronto, July 2016.

⁵⁴ Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

⁵⁵ Margaret E. Keck, and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁵⁶ Aihwa Ong, and Stephen J. Collier, *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004).

⁵⁷ Ross Gillard, Andrew Gouldson, Jouni Paavola, and James Van Alstine, “Transformational Responses to Climate Change: Beyond a Systems Perspective of Social Change in Mitigation and Adaptation,” *WIREs Climate Change* 7 (2016): 251–265, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/wcc.384/epdf>.

⁵⁸ Colin McFarlane, “Translocal Assemblages: Space, Power and Social Movements,” *Geoforum* 40, no. 4 (2009): 561-567, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2009.05.003>.

social imagination of activists in terms of its underlying values. Efforts to understand the climate movement in terms of its material networks or assemblages are useless without an understanding of how so many actors are able to simultaneously feel as though they are part of something bigger than themselves without necessarily connecting with one another in a formal or tangible way. When we can truly understand how these imaginary worlds are assembled and sustained, perhaps we might then begin to see how to mobilize them toward the ultimate goal of sustainability.

Conclusion

If I had the opportunity to redo this analysis, I might take a different approach. The notion of using intuitive methods of coding and code sorting as the foundation for constructing a logical framework to explain a phenomenon such as climate activism has many limitations. However, I think the ultimate conclusion of this analysis – that climate activism can be thought of as a movement in terms of core values which are negotiated in and through the strategies activists employ – is one that may be useful to both scholars and activists in strategy design and implementation. The ultimate purpose of this analysis is not to rank one strategy over another but, rather, to provide a language or conceptual framework for understanding climate activism in such a way as to allow for its diversity while revealing its common drivers. My hope is that doing so might be useful to building cohesion in the climate movement and in facilitating collaboration amongst diverse actors. In the next chapter, I discuss in more detail how values have come to play such an important role in activist struggles around climate change and how they function in the work of climate activists working to effect change on this issue in Toronto.

Chapter 3

Discussion

Yeah, I don't know how we're gonna move forward. But I think it's just important for people... to keep trying... and living in a way that's aligned to your values as much as possible, because sometimes that's way more impactful than campaigning.⁵⁹

In this chapter I consider the role that values play in activist strategies and imaginations for addressing climate change. I offer a comparative case study analysis based on my ethnographic fieldwork with climate activists in Toronto during the fall of 2016 as well as my personal experience as part of a campaign for fossil fuel divestment at the University of Toronto.

In the psychology literature,⁶⁰ values have been shown to be a key source of motivation in both activist struggles for social change^{61,62} and in the development of environmentally-friendly behaviours.^{63,64,65} The high value placed by activists on social welfare and environmental protection has come to be reflected in how they imagine and implement solutions for the climate crisis. Appealing to policy-makers and publics on moral grounds, activist campaigns for action on climate change deploy ethical arguments as leverage in challenging institutional norms and practices, as in when activists protest institutional investments in the fossil fuel industry.

⁵⁹ Sayan, interview by author, Toronto, December 20, 2016.

⁶⁰ In this chapter, I engage with the psychology literature in two ways: in terms of the findings on behavior change as they pertain to public engagement issues around climate change and in terms of the relevance of this literature to the activists I interviewed. My invocation of this research was initially inspired by my conversations with one activist in particular (Vincent) and was also influenced by discussions with several other members of the People's Climate Movement.

⁶¹ Milton Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values* (New York: The Free Press, 1973).

⁶² Marc Stewart Wilson, "Values and Political Ideology: Rokeach's Two-Value Model in a Proportional Representation Environment," *New Zealand Journal of Psychology* 33, no. 3 (November 2004): 155-162, accessed August 4, 2017, *Academic OneFile*.

⁶³ David G Karp, "Values and their Effect on Pro-Environmental Behavior," *Environment and Behavior* 28, no. 1 (1996): 111-133, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013916596281006>.

⁶⁴ P. Westley Schultz, and Lynnette Zelezny, "Values as Predictors of Environmental Attitudes," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 19, no. 3 (1999): 255-276, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1006/jevp.1999.0129>.

⁶⁵ Paul C. Stern, "Toward a Coherent Theory of Environmentally Significant Behavior," *Journal of Social Issues* 56, no. 3 (2000): 407-424, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00175>.

Unfortunately, such tactics have, in some cases, backfired, as moral positioning is used by corporate and political elites against the demands of environmentalists and as a substitute for taking quantifiable action on climate change. Alternative activist approaches working from the bottom-up favour avenues like community building and social entrepreneurship. Such approaches prioritize individual agency and personal well-being in their calculations of environmental sustainability. These efforts are not only about furthering the kind of social change that will lead to more sustainable societies but also about initiating the kind of social change that will be sustainable in the long run for both people and the planet.

Part I – Climate Politics and the Battle for the Moral High Ground

In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Amitav Ghosh writes that, “Climate change poses a powerful challenge to what is perhaps the single most important political conception of the modern era: the idea of freedom...”⁶⁶ Citing Dipesh Chakrabarty,⁶⁷ he contends that the great thinkers of the Enlightenment, when they were considering how society might transcend various forms of oppression, never considered that the oppressor could one day come in the form of Nature itself. “Non-human forces and systems had no place in this calculus of liberty: indeed being independent of Nature was considered one of the defining characteristics of freedom itself.”⁶⁸ Inherent to our most fundamental political ideals from their inception was the notion that people are not only above nature but that they should strive to be. In the age of the Anthropocene, the ultimate question is no longer how to transcend nature, but how to reconcile our most entrenched values of personal freedom with the need to create sustainable societies.

⁶⁶ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press: 2016), 119.

⁶⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197-222, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/596640>.

⁶⁸ Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 119.

With the rise of neoliberal capitalism, political freedom has become ideologically and institutionally coupled to economic freedom. In the corporate sphere, this has entailed the freedom to invest one's money where one chooses, which generally means wherever it will generate the highest profits. In the past few decades, however, corporations have faced increasing pressure to be responsible to more than just their bottom line as discourses around "corporate social responsibility"⁶⁹ have gained prevalence. Under pressure from consumers, corporations around the globe have begun to institutionalize policies promoting social, economic and environmental responsibility.⁷⁰ Such policies are generally voluntary and their efficacy difficult to measure, particularly in the context of environmental impacts. Nonetheless, the desire amongst corporations to appear morally responsible to consumers has become leverage for activists working to effect institutional change that might further climate sustainability goals. Campaigns urging stakeholders to divest their stock in fossil fuels have become a choice strategy of many climate activists. Divestment campaigns have been deployed to pressure universities, churches, businesses, and governments to divest from fossil fuel corporations as a way to promote climate sustainability and to diminish the financial and ethical capital of the fossil fuel industry and the institutions that profit from it.

From 2013 to 2014, I was involved in the fossil fuel divestment campaign at the University of Toronto, which was one of hundreds of similar campaigns across North America and around the globe. The campaign was modelled on previously successful tobacco and apartheid divestment campaigns and entailed the use of bureaucratic procedures set up decades

⁶⁹ "Actions of firms that contribute to social welfare, beyond what is required for profit maximization, are classified as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)." Abigail McWilliams, "Corporate Social Responsibility," *Wiley Encyclopedia of Management* 12 (2015):1-4, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781118785317.weom120001>.

⁷⁰ Archie B Carroll, "A History of Corporate Social Responsibility: Concepts and Practices," in *The Oxford handbook of corporate social responsibility*, edited by Andrew Crane et al., 19-46 (Oxford University Press, 2008).

ago by the University to afford students a channel to impact University decisions around investment based on ethical concerns. The procedure for challenging University investments on moral grounds required us to create a brief⁷¹ explaining how fossil fuel companies contribute to social and environmental harm and then submit that brief to the president. Upon presenting the brief to the University administration, they were required to strike a committee to investigate the case. Like other forms of campaigning, our strategy also involved petitioning, lobbying, organizing rallies and events, as well as other efforts aimed at raising the level of public awareness around the issue and bringing as many people on board with our message as possible. That way, if the University rejected our case, we would have the support of the community in staging a massive retaliation.

Ultimately, the committee that was struck to review our case voted in favour of divestment. However, the president vetoed their decision and effectively ended our campaign. We were prepared for this possibility, and that is why we did all the additional work of promoting the issue in the University community. The goal was to create a context in which the University's decision not to divest would be seen by many as against the best interests of society and the environment, as counter to the ethos of the University community, and as revealing the hypocrisy of the University in not living up to their own standards around ethical investing. Few would question the good financial sense of a powerful and wealthy institution like the University of Toronto. But people might be swayed to question its values if it continued to invest in an industry contributing to so much harm.

Unfortunately, our grounds for criticizing the moral standards of the university were severely diminished by a statement released by President Meric Gertler in reference to the

⁷¹ Milan Ilnyckyj, et al, "The Fossil Fuel Industry and the Case for Divestment: Update" (brief, published online, 2015), accessed on July 4, 2017, <http://www.toronto350.org/brief>.

University of Toronto’s decision not to divest. The document, boldly titled, “Beyond Divestment: Taking Decisive Action on Climate Change,” begins with the following statement from the president:

The University welcomes the Report of the Advisory Committee led by environmental engineering professor Bryan Karney, and we commend the Committee for its work. The severity of the challenge posed by climate change requires us to take a comprehensive – and ultimately more impactful – approach to managing the University’s long-term direct investments and, over time, its long-term indirect investments.⁷²

Gertler’s statement asserts that the university will not divest from fossil fuels while acknowledging “the severity of the challenge posed by climate change,” making it difficult for our campaign to argue that the University rejected divestment because they are indifferent to climate change. Rather, they will take a “more impactful” and “comprehensive” approach.

Divestment, Gertler contends, would not go far enough to address the problem.

A serious limitation to any decision to divest from fossil-fuel companies is that such firms only account for one-quarter of Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions, with the balance produced by other sectors such as transportation, housing and manufacturing. Building on the Committee’s advice, an approach that considers ESG factors – including climate-related risk – as they pertain to all sectors of our economy would seem to offer the best chance of success in meeting the challenge of climate change, while fulfilling our fiduciary duties to the University’s pension and endowment fund beneficiaries.⁷³

The president’s statement claims that, because fossil-fuel companies are only a part of the problem, a solution is needed to address other sectors of the economy, such as “transportation, housing and manufacturing” (all of which, of course, are heavily dependent on fossil fuels). He argues that an “ESG” approach, which is one that considers (on a voluntary, case-by-case basis) environmental, social and governance factors including climate-related risk in managing investments, would be far more effective than outright divestment. Such an approach lends itself

⁷² Meric S. Gertler, “Beyond Divestment: Taking Decisive Action on Climate Change” (University of Toronto official document, published online, 2016), 1, accessed on August 4, 2017, <http://www.president.utoronto.ca/secure-content/uploads/2016/03/Beyond-Divestment-Taking-Decisive-Action-on-Climate-Change.pdf>.

⁷³ Ibid.

to strategies for dealing with climate change that might include investments in educational initiatives, new research into sustainability, and even retrofits to building infrastructure – actions which are in line with what the University is already doing, and actions that will likely do little to slow the progress of global warming.

Divestment campaigns have largely failed to hinder corporate investments in fossil fuels. The strategy of using corporate discourses of social responsibility to strip institutions which invest in fossil fuels of their moral high ground has been offset by what Ghosh describes as “an ever-growing divergence between a public sphere of political performance and the realm of actual governance.”⁷⁴ As the public sphere has become a stage on which to act out moral positions, institutions and their administrators can perform ethical certitude while actual governance decisions are made largely behind the scenes and beyond the sphere of public influence. Ironically, argues Ghosh, the public’s diminishing capacity to impact actual governance is deeply rooted in the historical shift from coal to petroleum-powered economies. Unlike coal, which has many “choke points” where workers can exert power in its movement, oil “flows through pipelines that can bypass concentrations of labour.”⁷⁵ The switch from coal to oil, he contends, was as much about economic efficiency as it was about concentrating power beyond the reach of public citizens and in the hands of elites.

Campaigns for fossil fuel divestment are part of a shift in the discourse around climate change whereby arguments for climate-friendly policy are increasingly made on moral grounds. As Ghosh argues, the confluence of politics and morality has ultimately contributed to public paralysis around taking action on climate change. As the climate crisis has come to be framed in terms of social and environmental harm, this has allowed for proponents of a business-as-usual

⁷⁴ Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 129.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

approach to deflect criticism by pointing out the moral flaws and failings of activists themselves, as when Al Gore is criticized for the number of lightbulbs in his home.⁷⁶ Of course, the problem of climate change is bigger than any one individual's actions and requires collective solutions. But by bringing arguments for climate action into the domain of morality, climate advocates have inadvertently shifted the discursive battleground from questions of policy to questions of personal values. Significantly, they have also opened the door for moral arguments against taking action on climate change. Democratic institutions are deeply rooted in Enlightenment tenets of individual freedom that are based on values of transcending the natural world for the sake of human advancement. In a world where that which is moral is also that which advances the freedom of the individual, inaction on climate change can also be justified on moral grounds.

Part II – Positive Approaches to Climate Engagement

From its inception, the People's Climate Movement (PCM), like other climate action groups in Toronto, was focused on strategies to engage the public in efforts to address climate change. Its founding members were among those who helped organize the Toronto People's Climate March, which brought approximately 3000 people into the streets on September 21st, 2014,⁷⁷ in conjunction with the United Nations Climate Talks happening in New York City. After the march, a subset of the organizers decided to continue to work together as the Toronto PCM. In 2015 they launched a public engagement campaign called Step Up, which was timed to coincide with the lead-up to the Paris Climate Summit (COP 21) and the Canadian federal election.

It was a really important moment because we had the opportunity as PCM climate activists to really look to engage the public in saying climate really needs to be on our political agenda, and we wanna make sure the government we're electing prior to the next climate change conference...is climate friendly and is cognizant of the urgency and is ready to act. So we were

⁷⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁷⁷ Ethan Lou, "3,000 Join Climate March at Nathan Phillips Square," *Toronto Star*, September 21 2014, accessed July 31, 2017, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/09/21/3000_join_climate_march_at_nathan_phillips_square.html.

really strategically trying to place ourselves as a group promoting climate engagement among citizens gearing up to a really important election at that time.⁷⁸

The Step Up campaign was modeled on Al Gore’s Climate Reality Project, which entails delivering educational lectures to the public about the scientific “reality” of climate change and the need for sweeping actions to address it, particularly, in the form of government interventions and market-based mechanisms. The Al Gore style of climate lecturing, however, has received some skepticism in recent years in terms of its efficacy in building broad-based support. While education on climate change remains an important aspect of climate advocacy work, some doubt the extent to which “hurling scientific data”⁷⁹ at the public is leading to increased engagement around the issue. One criticism is that simply informing people about the harsh reality of climate change does not do enough to provide people with the positive motivations that might inspire them to take action.

I want to mention this idea of inspiring action instead of fear mongering, because I think we’ve learned, hopefully... that moving from a place of fear is never effective, and I think what we wanna do is create an inspiring campaign where people wanna be part of a movement. So whatever it contains by way of technical infrastructure, for me... the success will be based on how much we can inspire people to engage, and how much it will feel like... feel for people as though we were creating a space to be free.⁸⁰

While campaigns like Step Up and the Climate Reality Project are important for informing and engaging the public, they have their limitations. For instance, because they are quite time-consuming and require a lot of coordination, generating engagement around the campaign can become an end in itself as opposed to a means to increasing climate-friendly behaviours. Also, when they revolve around significant political moments like international events and policy decisions, it becomes difficult to sustain engagement once the moments pass.

⁷⁸ Halyna, interview by author, Toronto, December 23, 2017.

⁷⁹ Emmay Mah, “A Different Shade of Green: The New Face of the Climate Change Movement,” (presentation, University of Toronto, March 8, 2017).

⁸⁰ Halyna.

This is what happened with Step Up, which was abandoned after the 2015 election both because it had served its purpose at that point, and because, within the PCM, interest in doing climate presentations began to wane.

...we realized that, while we needed to be responsive to what government was doing, any sitting government, that wasn't all that we wanted to do, was to be constantly reacting, 'cause that can consume a lot of your time and energy. So I think there's a very strong feeling that it's important to hold government accountable, that they should be accountable to people. But at the same time there's also a need to do work that models the kind of society that you want to have or you want to see come into being.⁸¹

Post-Step Up, the group began to consider how they might develop a more positive approach to climate engagement that was less focused on national and international climate politics and lobbying to get climate change onto the political agenda and more focused on building sustainability from the bottom up. Their rationale was that for people to feel motivated to take climate-friendly action on an ongoing basis, their motivations would have to originate from more than just fear of an ecological catastrophe.

...we have a lot of people that have the capability to make decisions and choices about how they live, which isn't available to other people in our own communities, and it's certainly not available to other people in other parts of the world. So I think with that comes a responsibility to make more ethical choices. But people can't be told to do that, it's something that has to come from within. And for me, certainly, being part of the PCM group has helped me make those kind of more positive choices. I think I was making pretty good choices before, but it certainly opened my eyes in terms of the range of choice that I do have, and to not be fearful of really thinking big and being ambitious in the nature of the kind of change that I wanna see. ...I think what holds people back is they, one, don't think it's possible to see social change on that level and they, two, don't think it's possible to make those changes in their own lives.⁸²

Though campaigning to get climate change onto the national political agenda remains an important goal of the PCM, they have begun to focus more on developing strategies for climate engagement based on empowering individual agency. In this regard, they have been heavily

⁸¹ Emmay, interview by author, Toronto, December 20, 2017.

⁸² Ibid.

influenced by psychology research on behavior change which emphasizes the importance of values in motivating and informing people's decisions and behaviours.

In psychology, people's values are seen as a significant factor in determining their attitudes toward and actions concerning environmental issues like climate change. At the same time, values are understood to be generally rigid and resistant to change. "We know in the psychology literature that value changing is actually very difficult to [do]. A lot of psychologists believe it just doesn't even happen and it's impossible."⁸³ The difficulty in changing peoples' values can pose a challenge for activists working to engage people in the climate issue. If environmental sustainability is not already high on a person's list of values it will be difficult to motivate that person to take actions based on the importance of sustainability alone. Thus, the PCM is working to motivate people to take action on climate change through interventions that help them to connect their own, pre-existing values to climate-friendly behaviours.

... You can't change values. You really need to create interventions that are going to be looking at helping people choose new behaviours based on their current values. ... What I think is most important to do is a values priming exercise, where... each person finds their own values and connects their own values to climate concerns. And this is something called a values card sort... You basically rank from a number of different cards, what are the things that are most important to you... Maybe it's duty, maybe it's health, maybe it's family, maybe it's wealth, maybe it's virtue, comfort, safety... Whatever values are important to you, tie those values to the climate concerns and climate effects that you see happening in your own specific life, in your own specific area. ... Maybe it's something that you think might affect your kids... Draw connections between these climate concerns that you have and the values that are most important to you – those are your motivations to do something about climate change.⁸⁴

Understanding how to motivate people to care about and take action on environmental issues has been a significant area of concern in environmental psychology since the inception of the discipline. But rather than trying to motivate people to take action out of a concern for the

⁸³ Vince, interview by author, Toronto, November 18, 2016.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

environment per se, Vince's method is about helping people to tie their pre-existing values to climate-friendly behaviours.

I don't tell people what to do on changing their behaviours. I empower autonomy for people to be able to change their own behaviours by giving them either the right information that they need to facilitate their own change or helping them to find their own motivations for change through something called motivational interviewing.⁸⁵

Motivational interviewing is a strategy in which the interviewer, rather than trying to influence the decisions or behaviours of the interviewees, helps them to find their own motivations for change. It was originally employed by psychologists in helping patients with varying degrees of receptivity to treatment in overcoming addictions. The idea is that intrinsic motivations for change are more robust and thus likely to sustain behaviour change in the long run. For Vince, motivational interviewing is not solely about getting people to change themselves. It is also about creating change-makers who might then empower others to follow their example.

For me, it's all about looking at empowering all people to be able to change their behaviours and even empowering other people to empower other people to change their behaviours. The fact of the matter [is], when I look at climate change, the time for 20% of the population to solve the problem is over. If we want to solve this problem and deal with it we need a much higher percentage of the population to be engaged which means we need to empower people with autonomy to really be able to make this happen.⁸⁶

This focus on empowerment through positive motivations is also based on the finding of behavioural change research which contends that fear is generally a poor motivator for environmental action.⁸⁷ It leads people to move away from, rather than engage with, the problem.

In this regard, consciousness-raising strategies that rely on "discourses of fear"⁸⁸ (à la the AI

⁸⁵ Vince.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Saffron O'Neill, and Sophie Nicholson-Cole, "'Fear Won't Do It' Promoting Positive Engagement With Climate Change Through Visual and Iconic Representations," *Science Communication* 30, no. 3 (2009): 355-379, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1075547008329201>.

⁸⁸ Hulme, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*, 2009.

Gore method) to sway people to take action may be contributing to the problem of climate denialism they are seeking to counteract.

...If you have a hundred riled up environmentalists charging into their elected person's office saying, "the world's ending, you need to do something now," that elected representative is just gonna be like shutting down. [It's that] whole fear-cycle mindset. So you really have to empower the elected representative with their own values and help them to try and tie their values to legislative objectives.⁸⁹

The importance of individual agency in addressing climate change is also reflected by the work PCM activists do outside of the group, both in their collaborations with other organizations and in their professional lives. Several PCM members work in the field of social entrepreneurship, which is about using the mechanisms of business and organizational development to address social and environmental issues. Social entrepreneurship has received little attention from anthropologists, aside from a few exceptions which have taken a critical standpoint on its use, particularly in the context of corporate solutions for poverty alleviation.⁹⁰ But the overall study of social entrepreneurship has seen a sharp rise in recent years,⁹² accompanied by the influx of social entrepreneurs in urban centers around the globe, including Toronto. Toronto has become a major hub for social entrepreneurship, evinced by the proliferation of co-working spaces like the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI), which is also the space where the PCM holds their meetings.

Through his organization, Environmentum, Vince consults with climate activists and social change seekers on how to deploy the techniques of motivational interviewing in their

⁸⁹ Vince.

⁹⁰ Anke Schmittay, "The Marketization of Poverty," *Current Anthropology* 52, no. S3, "Corporate Lives: New Perspectives on the Social Life of the Corporate Form," edited by Damani J. Partridge, Marina Welker, and Rebecca Hardin (2011): S71-S82, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/656472>.

⁹¹ Sarah D Phillips, "Will the Market Set Them Free?: Women, NGOs, and Social Enterprise in Ukraine," *Human Organization* 64, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 251-264, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://sfaajournals.net.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/doi/pdf/10.17730/humo.64.3.algh7nqum19m8b4l>.

⁹² See *The Journal for Social Entrepreneurship*.

advocacy work. Halyna, also a social entrepreneur, co-founded The Roots Collaborative (TRC), “a sustainability-consulting organization. It’s not-for-profit, and it’s a cooperative whereby we have a number of...social entrepreneurs that are members of our coop, and we offer services in sustainability, taking a very holistic approach.” TRC consults with individuals, communities, businesses, and other organizations as to how they can implement principles of sustainability into their practices. It brings together experts and professionals from all different sectors to address a variety of questions and concerns. TRC is unique in its understanding of sustainability in that it strives to integrate the goals of ecological responsibility with those of personal well-being.

Sustainability is usually understood as this triple bottom line approach, so three pillars: there’s the environmental pillar, economic and social. These are all considerations that you take into account when managing a system. So it’s a systems approach. But we have a forth pillar that we pay attention to, and that’s personal wellbeing, which...it’s a very important piece for me and I’d say arguably for [the PCM], that we see sustainability as not only making changes out there and improving our environmental footprint or our social impact... It’s directly related to how we are to ourselves within ourselves.⁹³

For the PCM activists, increasing public engagement around climate change is about more than just campaigns for government action, educating people on climate science, and promoting environmentally-friendly behaviours. Inspired by the notion that living in line with one’s values is both intrinsically rewarding for individuals and beneficial to strategies for climate sustainability, the PCM aim to increase climate engagement by helping people find tie their own values to climate concerns and find their own motivations for engaging in climate-friendly actions. Employing a holistic approach to environmental sustainability that considers personal and interpersonal well-being in its strategies, they aim to inspire the kind of social change that will benefit both people and the planet. In and through positive approaches to climate engagement rooted in values of personal agency and autonomy, the PCM is working to inspire action on climate change by initiating social change that is intrinsically- motivated and

⁹³ Halyna.

personally-rewarding in the hopes that this is the kind of social change that is likely to be sustainable in the long run.

PART III – Building a Values-Based Climate Movement

Many of the activists I spoke with over the course of my fieldwork described to me the experience of coming to be involved in the climate movement in terms of a “call” to action.

When I asked Emmay why she left her old job to focus all her attention on climate advocacy, she described “feeling a very strong sense of connection with the purpose and the mission and the need to do this now and having that, I guess, personal awakening or realization that this was the thing that I needed to be focused on even though I didn’t have an environmental background.”⁹⁴

Similarly, Vicki’s desire to find more fulfilling work actually led to her involvement with the PCM when she answered Avaaz.org’s call-out for organizers for the Toronto sister march to the People’s Climate March happening in New York City.

I got really dissatisfied with my job at TD... So I was doing a lot of job searching. And then I...realized that I’m not actually doing work that I’m passionate about and how much more fulfilling it would be if I did work that I was passionate about. So I started looking in the environmental field. I started signing up for a lot of things online, sending my resume out... And it was through Avaaz.org... They had an email about organizing an emergency climate march... So I just signed up...to help lead it.⁹⁵

To say that a desire for values-alignment has had a profound impact on the climate activism of today is not to say that all climate activists share the same values. Nor is it sufficient to say that common values around sustainability, social justice or even “practicing what you preach” are shared by all climate activists. Climate activists constitute a plethora of diverse cultures, backgrounds, politics, goals, beliefs and motivations, and the turn toward values is, for many activists, ultimately about accommodating and supporting this diversity rather than trying to devise a one-size-fits-all approach to sustainability. Such activists are moving away from a

⁹⁴ Emmay.

⁹⁵ Vicki, interview by author, Toronto, December 27, 2016.

narrow-minded focus on outcomes toward a more holistic approach that is deeply reflective about the processes by which outcomes are achieved.

Undergirding the emphasis on process is a strong motivation to find ways of addressing multiple social and environmental issues simultaneously by targeting their shared “root” causes. With this goal comes the knowledge that, while climate change is imbricated with a host of social issues, addressing climate change in and of itself will not necessarily fix these other problems. However, it may open up a path to zeroing in on some of their collective root causes.

...when we look at many of the global issues and some of them I'd worked on, they're all going to be impacted by climate change. All of the communities and populations that I've worked with over my career are gonna be impacted by climate change. Some of them are on the front lines of it, so I thought, “well, it makes sense, if I'm working on these other fronts, I really need to do work that addresses root causes.” And addressing climate change is at the heart of addressing root causes.⁹⁶

Though Emmay does not consider climate change to be a “root cause” of social issues per se, she views addressing climate change as a way to tap into some of the systemic problems that are contributing to many global issues. The challenge for activists becomes figuring out, first, what are the systemic issues that are contributing to problems like climate change and global suffering and, second, how does one begin to target and revision these systems?

Much of the contemporary discussion around system change has come to focus on political economy and, specifically, the limits of neoliberal capitalism to produce social welfare and ecological sustainability. But how does one go about changing capitalism? For many climate activists, this is a desirable goal but one that will be difficult to achieve in a time frame necessary to mitigate severe global warming.

We have 25 years, what we are talking about? Changing capitalism... This is nonsense. Naomi Klein... I think she's had a lot of bad effects on this movement. We won't be able to change capitalism, but what we can do is to put in place certain policies, like Jacobson's work... We know [solving climate change] can be done, even without changing capitalism and peoples'

⁹⁶ Emmay.

mindsets. And we don't have to, because if we move to 100% renewable energy in all sectors – electricity, aviation, transportation – we're good. ...I am a socialist I would be happy to get rid of capitalism, but taking on these two tasks at the same time will be a failure.⁹⁷

The urgent need to mitigate the effects of carbon emissions is not always easy to reconcile with the goal of creating progressive social change. But for many activists it is not only possible but essential to incorporate both of these goals into climate advocacy work.

What incorporating the goals of system change and climate mitigation has meant for the PCM, in addition to a significant emphasis on strategic planning and visioning, is the high value placed on supporting and promoting civic engagement. For the PCM, addressing the systemic causes of global issues like climate change is very much about increasing the extent to which citizens are active and engaged in public life. Rather than pushing an agenda on the public, supporting civic engagement is about encouraging citizens to get informed on and participate in discussions around important policy decisions and issues like climate change. Modelling and creating opportunities for such forms of engagement, through their own work and through their collaborations with other groups, is a high priority for the PCM. One example is when they co-organized a community Town Hall on the topic of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement. The Town Hall was meant to provide a forum for Canadians to learn more about the agreement and vocalize concerns in the presence of political representatives. It included a bi-partisan panel of experts who fielded questions and provided information on the agreement and its potential impacts on intersecting issues like climate change, global health and the economy.

Our goal...for these Town Halls is to provide information to the general public...and give them a range of information... It's supposed to be nonpartisan. So at the TPP Town Hall we had two anti-TPP panelists and we had one pro-TPP panelist, and it just provides the residents with both sides of an argument or both sides of any topic, and they can form their opinions from there. The goal is also to get them more civically engaged. So by providing them information and also having an elected official at the Town Hall they're able to either ask a question, like, "okay, how

⁹⁷ "Anonymous," interview by author, Toronto, July 2016.

do we get involved with this and maybe work with our elected official's office towards a certain goal," or you can ask them directly when they're there...

The PCM's emphasis on creating inclusive spaces for citizen discussion and debate is a value that they try to model within the group itself in and through intragroup processes of decision-making and collaboration. The PCM places a high degree of importance on internal group functioning, meaning that discussions around which projects to focus on emphasize personal and inter-personal well-being and the value of engaging with diverse perspectives. Decisions are made informally but democratically, and always with an emphasis on individual agency and mutual understanding.

Everybody gets a vote... We're very inclusive. Any ideas you have, it's documented and considered within the group at least. And even if a majority of the group doesn't wanna take it on as a full campaign or a main campaign, you can still pull together a subset of people from the group that are interested in looking into an idea further. ...there's something that we do called a "dotmocracy," where we might think of ideas that we want to look into, we'll throw it up on a board, and then we get these little dot stickers and you vote on the issues that you think are important to you. ... You can put a dot as to if...you'd like to take a lead on something or you can put it into like a supportive kind of role.⁹⁸

Creating a mutually-supportive atmosphere within the group is also crucial to its functioning and entails providing emotional support as well as support for each other's ideas.

It's kind of like an open space where, if you look at a lot of the things we've done, they haven't come from one person. Like, I could name, "well, this idea came from this person and that thing over there we did that came from that person," and then you'd see that there is really a multiplicity of ideas that are brought to the table, and people get on board with other peoples' ideas. And I think that's probably the best thing about our group is that people are open to taking an idea that's presented by someone else and really supporting it and bringing it to fruition.⁹⁹

At the core of PCM members' ability to work with each other and engage with each other's differences is a shared appreciation for diversity.

...I just love that it's... There's just so many different types of people there, and we engage with each other always with the respect that we all care about the same thing and we're all there to

⁹⁸ Vicki.

⁹⁹ Emmay.

achieve the same goal and we all deeply care about achieving that goal in the most impactful and efficient [way] possible, and that's where we're coming from.¹⁰⁰

Values of individual agency, democratic decision-making, and diversity are all important for the cohesion of the PCM and their ability to function effectively in the work that they do. Members of the group come from diverse backgrounds, and they do not always agree. But what they all share is an appreciation for difference and a belief in the value of creating a positive and supportive environment. “We’re all quite different people and we have different perspectives... But we have a respect for one another and a respect for all the opinions that people bring to the table.”¹⁰¹

As climate activism has evolved in recent years in the context of intersecting movements for social justice, it has become increasingly clear that, as important as it is to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change, it is equally important to address the root causes underlying it. But what does addressing root causes actually mean for activists working to effect change in these intersecting areas? For the PCM, it means tempering the need to get things done with the need to do so in a way that supports individual agency and well-being. “I feel that we ultimately do end up making decisions which is important, but we are placing an emphasis on the importance of the process. So getting us to that decision means we hear everyone out. And that means deeply listening, it doesn’t mean just token gesture listening.”¹⁰² Always tempered with concerns about making progress on addressing climate change is the understanding that emotional connections and collective support are at the heart of building a sustainable movement for social change.

And I believe, again, along with the tone of respect for one another is this idea of not “guilting” people into things. So... you never feel bad or you shouldn’t and I hope others don’t if you can’t

¹⁰⁰ Sayan.

¹⁰¹ Halyna.

¹⁰² Ibid.

engage in one campaign or another. We're I think quite accepting of all of us having busy lives and that we commit as much as we can. So I think because of that that it's that again acceptance and ability to move in and out and ramp up your engagement and take it down a notch when you're just too busy... I think because of that people feel that they don't have to completely break off which I have found to be the case in many groups where you just feel like wow I'm not contributing and I feel bad or you feel guilty and so because of that sensation you don't want to be a part of the group anymore.¹⁰³

A significant challenge for the climate movement, as well as other progressive social movements, is the challenge of growing and sustaining the involvement of members. This is perhaps the area in which the Al Gore method of public engagement has come up short. It is one thing to convince people that climate change is an urgent issue. It is another to build a robust movement for change. One of the challenges of climate activism is not just convincing people to care about the issue, but building a movement that people want to be a part of.

Yes and being respectful towards each other is part of that, and having fun actually is part of that... A while ago, president's choice came out with a line of very consciously healthy foods, but they made the effort to make them tasty, and their motto was, "it's not nutritious if nobody'll eat it," which I really liked because I've always believed, nobody's gonna buy into your ideology if you're not having any fun. Nobody will want to be like you if you are not living a desirable life. It doesn't mean you have to be rich, not at all. But if you are living in a way that is successful in terms of having good relationships and enjoying life, then you're much more likely to attract adherents.¹⁰⁴

What I observed in all of the activists I spoke with from the PCM was that they all on a personal level received an intrinsic benefit from being a part of the PCM group in particular and the climate movement in general. "There's a little bit of a misnomer that doing this work is self-giving, but it's so much self-receiving."¹⁰⁵ At the heart of the personal benefits activists attach to this work is the sense of connection it fosters, not just with others but with oneself. When I asked Emmay how she is able to remain optimistic, she responded:

¹⁰³ Halyna.

¹⁰⁴ Sue, interview with author, Toronto, December 30, 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Halyna.

It helps being surrounded by good people who are also optimistic [laughs]. I mean I think we all have our moments. But I think... when you get in with people that share that sense of momentum in doing good work it really helps a great deal and it addresses the isolation. And I think that's why there is a self-serving nature to volunteerism. People do it because they wanna do something good, but then you start realizing actually it makes you a lot happier as a person. It really adds something to your own life, and that's why you see a lot of the people who are most active in communities... I mean they've got a job, they've perhaps got family responsibilities, yet they're still the ones that show up all the time in, on evenings and weekends to do community activities. And there's a real human reciprocal benefit to that, so that helps.¹⁰⁶

Michael Albert, in a lecture at the Imperial College of London, contends that one of the main areas of lack in progressive social movements is the kind of community, comradery and support that is provided, in other contexts, by churches, clubs and even the socialization that revolves around sports teams.¹⁰⁷ The challenge of creating movements that actually benefit people and provide the kind of social support provided by other outlets is at the heart of the problem of movement growth and sustainability.

Building a movement for action on climate change is among the most challenging tasks of climate activists. Although much of the public is concerned about climate change, it is often low on peoples' lists of priorities relative to the risk it poses to humanity. At the same time, there is a significant stigma around even talking about climate change, and a huge task in building a movement is opening up a space where people can feel comfortable discussing climate change and its causes and consequences. Ultimately, everyone will be affected by climate change, and everyone (to varying degrees) is a part of the systems that are producing it. Part of addressing the climate challenge, then, is not only about getting people on board with the goal of climate sustainability but also looking inward to see what biases and actions exist within ourselves that are contributing to this problem.

¹⁰⁶ Emmay.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Albert, *Winning Change: The Role of the Social Justice Movement Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, podcast audio, ICU Political Philosophy Society – December 31, 2000 at 7:00 PM, accessed August 3, 2017, <https://itunes.apple.com/ca/podcast/icu-political-philosophy-society/id356351911?mt=2>.

The point is... what is it about our lives that allows us to know something, to know something is happening, and even to know the consequences for your own children and not do anything about it? So [the PCM] is looking at that question very deeply. And I think we need to first and foremost as environmentalists recognize that it applies to us as well, as active as we are – I know in my daily life there are many things that I do that aren't necessarily climate friendly. So I think we need to really look in the mirror... and I think importantly is that it's not that we're bad or good people, and we can't keep separating environmentalists/not environmentalists... I think that's what I meant by we're in this together and we need to come at this from a very nonjudgmental place. I really deeply feel that the only way we're gonna move out of this, and the only way we're gonna possibly overcome this challenge of climate change is by shifting the energy from which we move to an energy of love and acceptance and away from an energy of competition and judgement.¹⁰⁸

Supporting the agency of individuals in the struggle to build a movement to solve the climate crisis is at the heart of what groups like the PCM are trying to do in their advocacy work. For the PCM, it is not a question of pitting one value against another – personal autonomy vs. collective decision-making; individual values vs. social cohesion; freedom of choice vs. sustainable societies. Ultimately, the success or failure of the climate movement will come down to its ability to create a paradigm of sustainable social change that accommodates all of these intersecting values, and one that people are intrinsically motivated to support because it has tangible benefits to their own lives as well as the lives of those around them. Reframing the goals of climate activism in terms of social as well as environmental sustainability may be key to not only solving the climate crisis but also to ensuring that a climate friendly world is one in which people actually want to live.

I think part of me is like, “well, we are facing a very extreme global situation and there's a great deal of suffering.” But we have to turn this into an opportunity to create a better world, and we actually have a lot of those tools and we have the knowledge in our society to do that. We have – both from an ideas perspective, but also from a technological perspective too – but the technology is not gonna save us. It really has to come from a transformation within at a human level, and then the technology can be sort of tools that help us get there. So that's why I'm optimistic. It's not a question of we don't have the means. It really comes down to will. And I feel like... if it really comes down to will, that can be generated, that's not actually a real barrier. People can always turn around, they can embrace something that they think's of value ...¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Halyna.

¹⁰⁹ Emmay.

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As with capitalism, the challenges that have emerged from collective efforts to address anthropogenic climate change have increasingly been conceptualized by scholars in terms of a failure of imagination, or, an inability to conceive of alternative worlds or possibilities.

Similarly, many have come to see the goals of sustainability and the mechanisms of liberal democracy as potentially incommensurable. However, engaging with climate activists in the field reveals that imaginations of alternative possibilities for sustainable democracies are abundant in supply.

For me, [a climate-friendly society is] a society that's really sort of realigned its values in terms of what's important, and the physical space then reflects that. So it's a society that's really very connected to nature but also connected to other people.... There's a real sort of social orientation and people are enabled to make good choices that don't harm the environment which would mean things like public transit, say, green transit, [are] readily available to everybody. So it's not just criticizing people for making bad choices, they're now in a space where they can actually make good choices and it's not hard to make good choices.¹¹⁰

When it comes to climate change, the problem does not seem to be a lack of viable alternatives to current configurations. The barriers to sustainability are less to do with ingenuity than implementation. How do we begin to build a world in which it is possible to live in line with the values of both personal freedom and environmental sustainability?

For the People's Climate Movement, climate advocacy is not only about inspiring action on climate change but about finding ways to create more sustainable social configurations that work for people and the environment. This entails positive approaches to climate engagement that reflect the needs of individuals for personal autonomy and well-being. It entails a sense that living a life aligned to one's values is intrinsically rewarding. It entails an appreciation for diverse perspectives and the knowledge that for the climate movement to succeed it must

¹¹⁰ Emmay.

contribute to the welfare of its members. For these activists, engaging with the climate crisis is not so much an “obstacle to our flourishing” as it is an opportunity to address multiple social and systemic issues at the same time. It can help to generate new imaginations of the kind of world we want to live in as we consider what kind of energy we want our societies to run on – “an energy of love and acceptance” or one of “competition and judgement.” The former may ultimately prove to be a more sustainable resource than the latter.

Conclusion

With this thesis I explored the question: What are the strategies and imaginations activists deploy to initiate social change? I was interested to see what insights could be gleaned from climate activists as to how people might begin to envision and create more sustainable social configurations and address the causes and consequences of anthropogenic climate change. I began in Chapter 1 by endeavoring to conceptualize climate activism in terms of a social imagination. I posited climate activists as a group defined by shared identifications with universalizing political and scientific discourses on climate change. I theorized climate activists as indicative of “knowledge that moves, mobile and mobilizing” (Tsing 2005) in the form of universalisms around a concern for and desire to act upon the urgent threat of climate change. Also in Chapter 1, I traced the history of some of the dominant strategies of climate activists in Canada and the United States to show how they have come to frame the problem of climate change in terms of an impending ecological catastrophe and its solutions in terms of carbon mitigation. The failure of governments to meet science-based targets for reducing emissions has inspired activist calls for a global civil society movement. At the same time, social justice discourses have tempered climate activists’ emphasis on carbon with concerns for social welfare, sparking debates around the need for system change. The near certainty of humanity passing the tipping points warned of by scientists has also contributed to rethinking around sustainability. If and when the warnings of scientists come to pass we will be living in a completely different world, and we must ensure it is one in which our priorities as societies are in line with values of care and compassion.

Finally, in Chapter 1, I situated theory and history in relation to my personal background in activism. I offered several introspective narrations to expose the subjectivity of someone

concerned about climate change to the point of taking action. I revealed how discourses around climate change can work their way into the minds of conscientious citizens and motivate new ways of thinking and being in the world. My contention was that acting in line with one's deeply-held values and concerns can be both profoundly fulfilling and terrifically burdensome. We tend to locate feelings, values, beliefs and concerns within individuals. But when we understand people in terms of social imaginaries, we can start to see how the work of actively caring about climate change becomes compartmentalized in the collective conscience of a concerned minority.

In Chapter 2 I laid out my research methodology, which invoked a “grounded” approach to ethnographic fieldwork. I began by tracking down the Toronto People's Climate Movement, a climate action group that formed around the People's Climate March of 2014, to see how and whether these activists were progressing in building a climate movement. I joined their group as an ethnographer, which entailed attending their meetings, participating in their activities, and conducting one-on-one interviews. I also spoke with and interviewed other activists over the course of my fieldwork, which involved numerous meetings, rallies, marches, town halls, and other events. With all of the data I collected – interviews, observations, photos, flyers, videos – I developed an explanatory schema using the “code-sort” method. I coded and sorted the various passages and quotations in my data into the form of a Venn diagram of four key drivers of climate activists: crisis mitigation, social change, collective organizing and individual agency. I conceptualized these drivers as values because of how they motivate and inform activist decisions about which strategies to deploy.

Finally, in Chapter 3, I analyzed two separate but interrelated case studies of climate activism in Toronto. The first concerns the University of Toronto fossil fuel divestment

campaign I participated in and how it failed in two important ways: convincing the University to divest from the fossil fuel industry and stripping the University of their social license to profit from it. I attributed this second failure to how moral arguments can be used both to demand ethical actions and to perpetuate the status quo. Invoking the work of Amitav Ghosh, I situate these discourses in a broader context in which the conflation of morality and politics has produced a division of labour between a public sphere of moral performance and a private sphere of actual governance. In this context, corporations like U of T can perform moral certitude via discourses of social and environmental responsibility even as they continue to profit from the industries contributing to climate change.

In the second case, which focuses on the Toronto People’s Climate Movement, I explored activist strategies that employ positive approaches to climate engagement, working from the bottom up. Such strategies are rooted in a rejection of “discourses of fear” and an emphasis on empowering personal autonomy. Inspired by behavioural psychology, they work to facilitate social change by helping people find their own motivations for climate-friendly actions. Activists’ perception that values-alignment is intrinsically rewarding is reflected in professional pursuits in social entrepreneurship as well as in the understanding that part of achieving a sustainable climate is doing so in a way that works for people as well. Addressing root causes is not only about system change. It is also about creating an environment amongst activists that supports diversity, fosters conversation and affords space for creative collaboration. Achieving sustainable social change is ultimately about creating a context in which citizens are engaged in public life and can find personal fulfilment along with a sense of connection to others in sustainable living.

Discussion of Findings

The phrase, “think globally, act locally,” has gained popularity amongst social scientists and activists working to effect progressive change. But how does it apply to climate advocacy work? Some contend that the need for vast cuts in emissions demands climate solutions that are transnational and top-down. On the other hand, if we do not foster sustainability from the bottom-up, such measures are at risk of being rejected by the body politic. Climate change has been characterized as a game-changer that is perhaps more than our liberal imaginations can grasp. Our collective understanding of the science of global warming has not yet translated into new ways of living and being that are carbon neutral. When it comes to climate change, the work of local acting seems to be lagging somewhat behind the achievements of global thinking. So where do we go from here?

When I first encountered the People’s Climate Movement, what struck me was how harmoniously they collaborated as a group and how much fulfillment they seemed to derive from their work. I always thought of climate activism in terms of a compelling need to do something about global warming, but activism is not only about achieving outcomes in society at large. It is also about fulfilling personal needs that are often left unsatisfied in our contemporary world: the need for purpose, meaning, connection and community; to be productive, creative, active and engaged; and to feel one is having a positive impact on the world. The transition to modernity has had many positive effects, but it has also created new areas of lack in the form of unsustainable (and unequal) social configurations that we have not figured out how to rectify. Much of the work of contemporary activism thus revolves around matters of connection and reconnection – to each other, to our roots, to ourselves, and to nature.

When I began this study I was interested in how climate activists are initiating change. I hoped that answering this question might shed some light on how we might begin to create more sustainable societies. What I failed to consider in asking how people are affecting climate change, is how climate change is affecting us and how it is opening up new modes of thought and action that could potentially address other intersecting issues as well. Given the growing anthropological interest in how to achieve progressive change in the contemporary moment, it is worth considering how activist approaches to climate change might shed some light on the application of global thinking to local action in the context of strategies for social change. I offer some entry points to this discussion with few closing thoughts on how the insights derived from this ethnographic engagement with climate activism pertain to several classic dichotomous dilemmas that are pertinent to social change research.

First, considerations of solutions to climate change often get caught up in debates around the relative merits of individualism and collectivism. Should climate solutions be rooted in personal choices and consumer habits, or should they focus on collective coordination and fostering collaboration amongst multiple stakeholders? Of course, both individual and collective strategies will be necessary to address climate change. The more productive – but challenging – question is: how do we generate the will – at the individual and collective strata of societies – to implement the solutions to climate change that already exist? One insight to have emerged from this ethnography (and the findings of behavioral psychology) is that structuring solutions to climate change so as to support personal autonomy, well-being and connection is a productive way to align climate solutions with the needs of people and their communities.

Second, the climate crisis in many ways demands a rethinking of Enlightenment ideals that posit people as separate from and superior to nature. Toward the goal of building sustainable

democracies, creative possibilities emerge from the integration of civic engagement and climate mitigation strategies. Addressing climate change is not always thought to be synonymous with increasing the health and integrity of civic life, but the two are integrally intertwined. To build climate solutions from the bottom up, we must find ways to empower people to act as agents of sustainable change. Building healthy communities and fostering civic engagement will have innumerable benefits for social and environmental well-being while supporting and facilitating climate solutions that are also beneficial to the communities that adopt them.

On the question of balancing the urgency of the climate crisis with the need for systemic change, climate activists like the PCM afford another insight. In addressing both of these goals simultaneously, we might consider the tools for change that are already at our disposal and do not necessarily require a revolution of current systems. Social entrepreneurship, for instance, though it has elicited some skepticism from cultural theorists, may have an important contribution to make in this regard. It is a way for individuals to implement values-based projects while also earning a productive living, and its mechanisms are already in place and can be accessed and deployed more quickly than the bureaucracies of the political system, for example. Social entrepreneurship could be a fruitful area for further study in anthropology, and one in which ethnography could provide useful insights.

Finally, I would like to offer some closing remarks on the question of values and the role they might play in the climate movement. While living in line with one's values can be deeply rewarding on an individual level, how might it bolster strategies for progressive social change? Traditional beliefs around what it means to live a moral life have been severely challenged by the discovery of anthropogenic climate change and the realization that human civilization is having a destabilizing impact on the Earth's fundamental systems. It is no longer enough to be good to

each other. We must consider how to be good citizens of the planet as well, and doing so means finding ways to factor the needs of the non-human world into the mechanisms of modern society. Climate change is a manifestation of how individual actions fit within larger, often global systems. Carbon gases emitted anywhere effect life everywhere. Understanding how we as individuals and collectives contribute to global phenomena in and through the mechanisms of planetary systems may also help in illuminating our roles in other global systems, such as those that contribute to poverty and inequality.

Injustice anywhere contributes to injustice everywhere, to paraphrase Martin Luther King. This contention has been writ large by the scientific discovery of climate change and its anthropogenic origins. In addressing the problems of both climate change and social injustice, it is worth considering how, instead of criticizing people for participating in the systems that contribute to these problems, we might instead create contexts in which people can and will act in a way that is aligned to the goals of social justice and sustainability. When considering climate change from this vantage, the question becomes not how to convince people to care about and act on the problem but how to align solutions to climate change with the aims and mechanisms of social progress. As with the growing understanding that mitigating climate change will not automatically create more equitable social configurations, activists and other social change seekers are beginning to realize that educating people on the science of climate will not alone provide the means and the motivations to revision our current societies. To do this, we need to revisit and reimagine some of our most fundamental values and beliefs, including, and especially, the notion that changing current social systems to further the goals of social and environmental welfare is beyond our collective grasp.

Suggestions for Future Research

I have already alluded to some possibilities for future research, but I will summarize them here. First, there is a tendency in anthropology to narrow the scope of analysis to the local contexts of particular struggles, but there is good reason to move beyond this level of inquiry to explore how universal discourses and concerns are taken up by local actors in efforts to impact global crises. Such research would benefit anthropological inquiry into subjects like neoliberalism, globalization and capitalist expansion. There is no reason anthropology cannot and should not address questions of the universal with the same vehemence and methodological rigor with which it assesses the particular.

The area of climate activism begs further investigation in general but particularly concerning how individual agency can figure into in collective strategies for addressing climate change. How might we incorporate personal well-being and autonomy into sustainable system designs? Sustainability could ultimately provide answers to the climate crisis and to our societies' systematic reliance on limitless growth. But for environmental solutions to be themselves sustainable in the context of democratic societies, we must consider the role of the individual in building prosperous and climate-friendly social systems. Understanding how to combine the goals of environmental sustainability and social welfare could be useful in determining how to reimagine democracy in the Anthropocene as well as how to create a world in which living in line with one's values and sustaining the integrity and well-being of the planet go hand in hand.

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