

Special Thematic Section on "Rethinking Prefigurative Politics"

The Integrity of Process: Is Inner Transition Sufficient?

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Abstract

The Transition movement is based on the notion that peak oil, climate change and the precarious economic situation cause the greatest potential disruptions to human society and therefore require a pre-emptive response. As such its focus is on proactively creating a future in local communities that meets people's psychological and physical needs rather than reacting to the crises that seem imminent. This paper draws on research into the Transition movement in the Australian context that considers the role of inner Transition which is one of the features that differentiates Transition from other movements for change. However, inner Transition has tended to be marginalised in the movement, because ultimately, action oriented outcomes take precedence over the often difficult work associated with group dynamics and relational experiences associated with inner Transition, even though they can affect the carriage and outcomes of activities and projects. The privileging of outer over inner Transition and action over process is a reflection of broader society's grappling with the human dynamics inherent in any process of change. Where such concerns are unproblematised, this raises questions about the extent to which movements replicate existing paradigms and structures or take a prefigurative approach and challenge and re-imagine them in their practice.

Keywords: Transition movement, inner Transition, group dynamics, burnout, dualistic thinking

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The Transition movement is increasingly recognised as an important strand in civil society action on climate change and human induced ecological destruction (Barr & Devine-Wright, 2012; Westley et al., 2011). Its guiding rationale is that peak oil, climate change and the precarious economic situation cause the greatest potential disruptions to human society and therefore require a pre-emptive response (Hopkins, 2011). The Transition movement is based on the notion that by acting now to create a future we choose, rather than having one imposed in crisis mode, both our psychological and physical needs are better addressed (Hopkins, 2011). This is expressed in Transition publications as the need for both 'inner and outer Transition' (Transition Network, 2013; Hopkins, 2011), and inclusion of the 'inner' dimension in Transition is seen to be one of the features that differentiate it from other movements for change (Barr & Devine-Wright, 2012). However, as is discussed below, inner Transition has tended to be marginalised in the movement, because ultimately, action-oriented outcomes take precedence over the often difficult work associated with group dynamics and relational experiences associated with inner Transition, even

though they can affect the carriage and outcomes of activities and projects. The privileging of outer over inner Transition and action over process is a reflection of broader society's grappling with the human dynamics inherent in any process of change. Where such concerns are unproblematised, this raises questions about the extent to which movements replicate existing paradigms and structures or take a prefigurative approach and challenge and re-imagine them in their practice.

This article is based on qualitative research conducted into the Transition movement in the Australian context that was concerned with the dimensions of inner Transition (Power, 2012, 2015). I have drawn on the elements of this doctoral research that are particularly relevant to the themes of prefigurative politics. These relate to the aspects within the core groups of Transition initiatives where decisions are made and activities are carried out. Although the effectiveness of local Transition initiatives is reliant on people working together in ways that are mutually supportive, in practice this is often ad-hoc and seems to be dependent on people in initiatives having the necessary skills or motivation to take responsibility for these processes. The research suggests that decision-making is an area where Transition participants can tend to replicate existing power relations rather than addressing them, and the incidence of burnout among participants means that a focus on action can override the importance of maintaining personal sustainability. These are concerns for many activist groups and, as such, the discussion below is applicable to similar contexts. It would seem that where dualistic thinking that perpetuates the pre-eminence of action over process is not confronted, the potential of Transition and other similar groups as a force for transformative social change is limited.

The Transition Movement

The Transition model emerged from a Permaculture course in Kinsale, Ireland, during which students designed a community-wide energy descent plan for a low-carbon future given the anticipated impacts of climate change and peak oil. The term 'Transition town' was coined to describe the process of this community potentially 'making the transition from fossil fuel dependency to a state of energy independence' (Rooney, 2006, p. 1). Rob Hopkins, the Permaculture teacher, took the terminology and nascent framework of Transition to the town of Totnes in the United Kingdom where he collaborated with interested others to develop and implement Transition Totnes. The process of developing the original Transition town was documented and promulgated from its inception by Hopkins and others so that an adaptable blueprint was available for other communities (Hopkins, 2011, 2008). This evolved into the Transition Network which is coordinated from Totnes and functions as an international hub with a significant online presence that provides communication opportunities through newsletters, blogs and social media, and resources for local Transition initiatives. Additionally, two films about Transition have been produced and widely disseminated (Goude, 2012, 2009), and a series of books including three authored by Hopkins (2008, 2011, 2013) have been published. The Network's purpose is described as being 'to inspire, encourage, connect, support and train communities as they self-organise around the Transition model, creating initiatives that rebuild resilience and reduce CO2 emissions' (Transition Network, 2013).

Since 2006, when Transition Town Totnes was launched as the first official Transition initiative, the model has 'spread virally' to over 43 countries. It was quickly embraced by the English-speaking world and has since been taken up in a wide range of countries, including Brazil, India, Portugal, Argentina, South Africa, Thailand and many European countries (Transition Network, 2013). The international reach of the Transition model was facilitated in part by Transition training which was developed in 2007 and run in many of these countries (Hopkins, 2011).

Currently, almost 500 Transition initiatives are registered as official and over 650 are registered as 'mullers', the step before official status ([Transition Network, 2015](#)). The term 'Transition initiative' is now used rather than Transition town as these groups operate at various scales including municipalities, towns, suburbs and villages ([Hopkins, 2011](#)). It is also more accurate as it refers to a group of people aspiring to create change within their community rather than the whole community itself taking on the model.

Local Transition Initiatives

Although they are part of the wider Transition network, Transition initiatives self-organise and adapt the principles of Transition to their local context based on the skills, availability, capacity and enthusiasm of participants and their broader community. These principles are described as positive visioning, inclusion and openness, sharing and networking, Inner and Outer Transition, re-skilling, self-organisation, and decision-making at the appropriate level ([Hopkins, 2011](#)). Transition initiatives are usually formed by people interested in the Transition model as a way of promoting positive change in their communities. These people are often volunteers who meet together as a core group which generally seems to range between six and twenty regular participants. The early Transition literature suggested a series of steps that Transition initiatives move through ([Hopkins, 2008](#)), although this has changed over time to become suggested 'ingredients' which initiatives could adapt to their context ([Hopkins, 2011](#)). Although these ingredients and the Transition principles are not prescriptive, they are the core elements that distinguish Transition initiatives from other community groups concerned with local sustainability.

As a way of working for change in their communities, Transition initiatives often form groups that address core elements within a community such as food, housing, energy, education, transport, waste, economics and health. Such groups tend to develop projects as a subset of their Transition initiative which may also entail forming partnerships with other organisations in the community ([Transition Network, 2013](#)). Examples of Transition projects include creating community and/or school vegetable gardens, instigating local food markets, developing local renewable energy projects, setting up local exchange trading schemes and running a range of workshops on topics such as on keeping chickens, composting, preserving foods, basic carpentry, retrofitting homes and fruit tree pruning.

Transition and Social Change

Although there are a number of discourses about Transition in the academic literature, there is surprisingly little critical analysis about social change in Transition publications given that Transition is very much about 'rethinking assumptions and building new systems' ([Hopkins, 2010](#), p. 448) in the process of creating 'a healthier and happier community while reducing its vulnerability to risk and uncertainty' ([Hopkins, 2011](#), p. 45). The nature of the Transition approach, and the systems thinking that informs it, creates expectations of a theory of change that connects the personal, transpersonal and societal. Instead, the main models of change referred to tend to be psychological models of change that are more focused on theorising about change at an individual than a societal level. This may be due to the sense of inevitability underpinning Transition that, given the global situation, significant change is necessarily going to occur. Consequently, Transition frames approaches to change in the form of positive visioning of the future rather than through generating fear of a cataclysm ([Stevenson, 2012](#)). For instance, [Hopkins \(2011\)](#) asks, 'do we make change happen by striving to shock or depress everyone into action, or by creating a thrilling fascinating process that people can put their shoulders to if they wish?' (p. 36).

Due to the focus on creating a positive future, Transition has been critiqued for lacking analysis of causes of the global crises (Barr & Devine-Wright, 2012; Chatterton & Cutler, 2008; Quilley, 2013; Stevenson, 2012), 'being determinedly apolitical' (Haxeltine & Seyfang, 2009, p. 7) and neglecting analysis of power relations (Scott-Cato & Hillier, 2010). Connors (2010) describes Transition's 'hopeful naiveté of politics and power' (p. 5), while Barry and Quilley (2008) analyse Transition as 'an odd kind of social movement' that is 'resolutely non-confrontational' and they suggest that rather than engaging in a political response to climate change it has taken a 'pragmatic turn' (p. 21). Rather than engaging at a macro-political level, Transition is described by Scott-Cato and Hillier (2010) as addressing change at the micro-political scale where problems are solved more through community scale processes. In the right conditions then, by instigating change at a local level, 'destabilisation' of 'dominant socio-economic codes can occur' (Scott-Cato & Hillier, 2010, p. 880). Similarly, Transition is described as working through sub-politics by drawing in citizens who do not perceive themselves to be activists and prefer to be involved in Transition without such an identifier (Mason & Whitehead, 2012; Stevenson, 2012). Such positioning of the politics of Transition as potentiality at the community scale shifts the focus from an oppositional politics. This means that instead of resistance, hope for a resilient and positive future becomes the primary force that motivates people's involvement in Transition (North & Longhurst, 2013).

Prefigurative Politics

Prefigurative politics is a contested concept coined by Boggs (1977) which, in its simplest form, relates to the fulfilment of the 'ends' through the 'means' (Reedy, 2014). Maeckelbergh (2011) describes this as 'the real and the ideal' becoming 'one in the present' (p. 4) so that prefiguration refers to the importance of process. Yates (2015) proposes that the new social movements can be understood as having prefigurative orientations. Examples of this can be seen in the non-violence direct action movement (Epstein, 2002), the local food movement (Kleiman, 2009), the lifestyle movement (Haenfler, Johnson, & Jones, 2012), the Occupy movement (Maeckelbergh, 2011) and the climate justice movement (Chatterton, Featherstone, & Routledge, 2013). Yet, as Luchies (2014) points out, the reproduction of power relations and exclusion can still be prevalent in some movements. For instance, Pickerill and Krinsky (2012) claim that the Occupy movement while described as prefigurative failed in many ways to address issues of diversity.

The notion of embodying the principles of a movement, rather than waiting for the yet to be constructed future, is an integral focus of feminist (Roth, 2004; Siltanen, Klodawsky, & Andrew, 2015) and anarchist traditions (Reedy, 2014). Manguashca (2014) suggests that synergies between feminisms and anarchisms exist in the anti-oppressive analyses that infuse their prefigurative politics. This entails the critical dimension of praxis, in which the process of working for social change implies an ongoing awareness of social arrangements (Yates, 2015), cultural relations (Maeckelbergh, 2011) and anti-oppressive principles in action (Luchies, 2014). A feminist commitment to prefiguration is evident in the slogan 'the personal is political' which characterised the second wave of feminism and highlighted the necessity for both macro and micro levels of change (Mann, 2012). Feminist analyses of social change, while varying in the causes of structural inequalities recognise the political nature of challenging hegemonically inscribed gender and social relations and inherent power dynamics (Donovan, 2012). Consequently, working for change means being cognisant of complex underlying social and political contexts of interactions so that the process of working together for change 'even in its unfolding, produces the conditions for new practices and new politics' (Harcourt, 2006, p. 6). From a feminist perspective, which informs this paper, prefiguration is

contextual, situated and open to critique rather than an uninterrogated tacit assumption within social movements (Siltanen, Klodawsky, & Andrew, 2015).

In a discussion focussing on the alterglobalisation movement, Maeckelbergh (2011) argues that prefiguration is a powerful and necessary approach to social change. Because it is based in practice, she contends, prefiguration is strategic, and enables a lived experience of reorienting power dynamics. Particularly in movements for social change that recognise the complexity of their project, and where the outcomes are not inscribed or predetermined, it becomes essential that the processes and practices employed reflect the values and concerns of the movement (Maeckelbergh, 2011). Maeckelbergh suggests that this enables people to become empowered in their particular contexts and to evolve their practices over time. In emphasising the strategic nature of prefiguration, she points out that the strategy she refers to is not one that develops from hierarchal structures, but a horizontality that transform the centralising tendencies of power. In the case of Transition, where due to its network structure information flows multiple ways, this means ideally that power relations can be dispersed and distributed and devolved to the level of the local Transition initiative. However, as the following discussion suggests, staying a prefigurative course requires a commitment to process as well as structural features.

Research Approach

The following discussion draws on ethics approved doctoral research conducted into the Transition movement in Australia. I was interested to explore how people experienced their involvement in Transition, how they perceived it to be creating change in their communities and what sort of challenges they confronted. Also, because Transition seemed to be taking a new direction in comparison with many environmental movements through integrating a dimension referred to as 'inner Transition', I particularly wanted to consider how this works in practice and what differences it makes to the movement when it is incorporated. Overall, I conducted 30 interviews with 41 active Transition participants, and representatives from 32 Transition initiatives completed a qualitative survey. I sought 'key informants' (Maddison & Shaw, 2012) who were involved in the core groups of their Transition initiatives and were available to meet within the nominated time period. This means that the interviewees are not conceived of as characteristic of an average sample in a population, but rather as fractal representatives of the whole, offering different and overlapping perspectives (Mittleton-Kelly, 2003). I am not aware of any specific data pertaining to the demographics of Transition membership in Australia although several authors have noted that Transition has a predominantly white middle class membership in Western countries (Cohen, 2010; Merritt & Stubbs, 2012; Stevenson, 2012; Stuart, 2012) and this was reflected in the interviewees' demographics. Of the interviewees, 28 were female, 13 were male and three quarters of them were over 40 years old.

Approximately half of the interviewees had attended Transition training, a similar proportion have Permaculture experience and over one third had worked at some time in the community sector. The interviewees represented eight rural, twelve regional and ten urban Transition initiatives from the eastern Australian states. I initially contacted the people I met at Transition training regarding interviews which led to the 'snowball process' of research recruitment (Warren, 2012) whereby these participants referred me to Transition contacts in other local initiatives. The surveys were sent to 68 Transition initiatives which were not represented by the interviewees and whose details I found through internet searches. Representatives from 32 Transition initiatives across rural, regional and urban Australia responded to the survey. The semi-structured interview questions and open-ended survey questions

were designed to elicit the participants' reflections on their lived experiences of Transition. Pseudonyms were used to de-identify all participants.

None of the research participants self-identified as being an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander person. It is worth emphasising here that research participants did not discuss learning from or working with Aboriginal people or communities who, as the original custodians of Australia, could be important teachers for Transition participants. The silence about 'indigenous knowledges' in Australia (Grieves, 2009, p. 2) seems to be reflected in Transition. Sarra (2011) argues the need for high expectation relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians and Transition has the potential to be a forum for supporting this approach.

My Positioning

I am a founding member of my local Transition initiative and attended the initial Transition training in Australia facilitated by two of the trainers from Transition Totnes, UK. As such I am a participant in the community of authors who write about Transition as critical friends. These included 'sympathetic critiques' by academics who have had varying degrees of personal involvement with the movement and drawn on observation and experience to inform their analysis (e.g., Quilley, 2013; Haxeltine & Seyfang, 2009; Mason & Whitehead, 2012; North & Scott-Cato, 2012; Scott-Cato & Hillier, 2010; Stevenson, 2012). My experiences with the Transition movement necessarily influenced my perspectives during the research, and my positionality as a female researcher from a relatively privileged, white, Anglo background affected my research approach and interpretations (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Throughout the research process I practiced reflexivity which includes paying attention to the specific way in which our own agendas affect the research at all stages (Hesse-Biber, 2012) and I was mindful of the 'imperative for vigilance' so that I 'remained open to surprises' (Code, 2000, p. 5). The process of data interpretation was predominantly an inductive approach to thematic analysis. The qualifier is important, because although the interpretation was data driven, I was present in the process through my subjectivity and choosing to view the data through feminist and complexity lenses. It is also important to emphasise that my interpretation is layered over the participants' interpretations and that these are only partial accounts. Participants made meaning of their experiences in the process of the interview and determined what they would share and what they would withhold in the way they 're-told and re-membered' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 3).

Inner Transition

In the following section, aspects of inner Transition are used to explore the prefigurative politics of the Transition movement. I take this approach because the inclusion of inner Transition as a principle in the Transition model affords initiatives explicit opportunities for addressing issues regarding the alignment of practice and process which is a key concern of prefiguration (Maeckelbergh, 2011). For the purpose of this article, I draw on my research findings to consider two features of Transition that tend to be assigned to the realm of Inner Transition. I consider some of the group practices within local Transition initiatives such as decision making and leadership, and the incidence of burnout that occurs among participants in core groups. I suggest that issues within these areas relate to a perpetuation of dualistic thinking which can also be linked to a lack of analysis of gender relations. These are quite specific areas of Transition but they combine to provide a picture of the ongoing and everyday challenges encountered by participants in movements for change that seek to embody their principles.

Introducing Inner Transition

Inner Transition is grounded in Transition's whole-systems approach which acknowledges the split between inner and outer worlds that is perpetuated in the current paradigm ([Transition Network, 2013](#)). In more concrete terms, its incorporation was encouraged by Hilary Prentice, one of the early participants in Transition Totnes, who suggested a Psychology of Change working group. This evolved to become the 'heart and soul of Transition' as it was called in early Transition resources ([Hopkins, 2008](#)) and more recently inner Transition. Yet, despite its inclusion as a principle of Transition, inner Transition is still developing a presence on the Transition Network website and within Transition initiatives. People are mostly exposed to inner Transition through Transition training, segments in the Transition films and some of the Transition literature. For some people inclusion of this dimension is a draw card to involvement in Transition, while for others it is perceived as peripheral to Transition and appropriate only to a certain type of person. In some cases initiatives establish inner Transition working groups; in other instances inner Transition is acknowledged as part of the Transition approach and interpreted and enacted in various ways, while other initiatives do not engage with the concept.

Transition publications and an international survey conducted by the Transition network suggest a number of areas covered by the 'territory of inner Transition' ([Banks, 2012](#)). Sophy Banks, who is based in Totnes, has become the Transition Network's most visible and active proponent of inner Transition and integrated inner Transition into Transition training and into each of the Transition films. The 'strands' which have been drawn on to provide the tools and insights to help facilitate inner Transition are the fields of psychology, psychotherapy and eco-psychology in the West, writings about the transformation of consciousness, and Earth-centred wisdom from tribal or indigenous human cultures (Prentice, as cited in [Hopkins, 2011](#), p. 141). An international survey conducted into inner Transition practices among Transition initiatives elicited a number of themes which are a mix of the personal and the inter-personal and are related to people's inner processes and group dynamics. The themes are:

- Personal resilience and well-being
- Connection to nature
- Community connections and cohesion
- Psychology and personal growth
- Spirituality, spiritual practice and faith groups
- Healthy groups, meetings and event design ([Banks, 2012](#)).

The following text is used to describe inner Transition on the [Transition Network site \(2013\)](#):

If we are to transition to fundamentally different physical systems for living we will need a fundamentally different way of understanding the world. Changing our worldview from separate to interconnected, from scarcity thinking to enough for all, from competitive to collaborative, all form part of the inner Transition landscape. As individuals, we may experience a wide range of emotions as we imagine and work to build the future we want – or fear a future much worse. For many, the scale of the problems is simply overwhelming, and distraction or denial feels safer. Inner Transition is designed to help support us face a world that is changing faster than most can imagine or absorb.

Inner Transition, then, is concerned with the way that people relate within themselves, to each other and the world in the process of change. By naming this as an aspect within a social movement, Transition has provided participants

with opportunities for considering and valuing the way that their groups function and their interpersonal relations that are not necessarily provided in other movements for change. The discussion below considers group processes within core groups of Transition initiatives and the experiences of participants being overwhelmed by the commitment involved as volunteers in social movements.

Integration Into Practice

While interpreting the research data I noted that research participants tended to discuss how their group functions without reflection on the connection between the types of processes used and the outcomes sought; on whether their meeting processes reflected the ethos of Transition and whether it was important to be more intentional about this. Consequently, the processes that Transition initiatives employ internally in their meetings and in their external events are rich sites for analysis in terms of how groups within social movements confront existing structures or re-imagine and transform outmoded practices. As [Ife \(2013\)](#) points out in relation to community activism, it is not necessarily implicit 'that procedures will be democratic and that women and men of different cultural, ethnic and class backgrounds will be able to participate equally in community decision-making' (p. 232).

Most Transition initiatives are reliant on the members of their core group to keep the initiative viable. Meeting structure and frequency are particular to each initiative and they are held variously in cafes, people's homes, public spaces and community buildings; weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Research participants frequently stressed the informality of their core group meetings, and the tone of these meetings seems to be largely dependent on the personalities and/or personal agendas of attendees. In terms of governance structure, 10% of the initiatives surveyed were formally incorporated, 50% were auspiced by a community or environmental organisation and 40% described their structure as informal. Those that are incorporated explained it is largely for insurance and funding purposes. Sharon's observation of the challenges of actually working in groups captures the essence of the following section: *'It's tricky, when you read the "Transition Handbook" it sounds very cut and dried and very simple ... the stories they tell make it seem as though everything has proceeded pretty smoothly, but when you start working with real people it's not like that at all'*.

Group Processes

Decision Making

The challenges of making decisions and embracing a plurality of perspectives among group members is acknowledged in Transition publications ([Hopkins, 2008, 2011](#)) and some group work resources are available on the Transition Network website. Nevertheless, a clear pattern that emerged in my research was a lack of agreed group process around decision-making. [Barr and Devine-Wright \(2012\)](#) suggest that the work of Transition is 'about stripping away hierarchy and encouraging participation through consensus decision-making and providing open spaces for ideas and collaboration' (p. 529). 'Accordingly', they continue, 'Transition also relies on inclusivity and a collective sense of purpose and values to drive forward action' (p. 529). However, I found such reliance on assumed and implicit values largely uninterrogated by research participants, which raises concerns that if such issues are not dealt with explicitly through skilled processes then power relations of domination can be reinforced.

Consensus

The term consensus was frequently offered by research participants as the way that decisions are made in their core group meetings, yet on closer analysis, this did not refer to the more formal process of consensus which has been a hallmark of feminist and anarchist meeting processes ([Epstein, 2002](#); [Reedy, 2014](#)). Instead participants

referred to an informal mode of consensus, where group discussion usually eventuates in a decision. For example, decisions were described as being made *'loosely by consensus. Activities that are popular get acted on'* (Transition FJI) and we try *'to understand each other and present our views and just sort of come to a consensus'* (Andrew). However, informal consensus by discussion does not ensure that everyone present has a voice, or that more dominant voices do not have greater influence on decisions being made (Starhawk, 2011). Although some participants described such dominance in their groups they did not tend to analyse the implications of power relations. For example, in describing her group's experience of consensus, Sarah granted that strength of personality can be an issue: *'some people back down on things ... it might have something to do with the really strong people on the steering group who are very vocal'*. Similarly Paul pointed out: *'I think in any group there are people who are a bit more forceful on a particular issue and that gets carried'*.

If there are not some agreed processes around issues which are inscribed with power such as decision making, then 'patterns of gender relations and prescribed roles' can tend to perpetuate the group's discourse (Harcourt 2006, p. 4). This has long been a concern of feminist organisations that tend to work more explicitly with power relations to confront structures of domination (Roth, 2004) and centralisation of power (Maeckelbergh, 2011). Roth (2004) argues that in 'extra-feminist settings' where such dynamics may be invisible, it is necessary to be particularly vigilant in terms of inequality and power relations. This concurs with Maeckelbergh's (2011) analysis of horizontality in non-hierarchical social organisations which she describes as the process of 'decentralising power' whereby there is an awareness that inequality and power relations can occur in all social situations (p. 11). She argues that it is prefigurative to address the way that power operates through 'designing new structures of decision-making that are learned through practice' (p. 11). For instance, adoption of consensus decision making practices could be indicative of a 'commitment to prefiguration', but it requires an anti-oppressive consciousness to monitor the process (Luchies, 2014, p. 118).

The Transition Network (2013) advises using 'consent' as a decision making model rather than formal consensus as it is less time consuming and 'demonstrates collaborative compromise' (p. 1). However, what consent means or how the process is applied in practice is not described, and interestingly, none of the interviewees referred to 'consent' as their approach to decision making. Adopting inclusive processes takes time and commitment, however, as Seeds for Change (2013) argue, this is critical for developing alternative futures. Therefore, if Transition initiatives are concerned with aligning with the Transition principles in practice, a relatively formalised consensus process which enables a more equitable approach to decision-making could be implemented when groups are making important decisions. Additionally, competent interpersonal skills are required to move through the often lengthy process of consensus so that it is not diluted by traditional, hierarchical approaches (Reedy, 2014). As Eleanor explained: *'All of a sudden the Transition movement has come along and said; "hey, you can be part of the decision-making process, here come and join in". So that's a lot of skills in that whole process that our society's not used to doing. How to be a mediator, negotiator, teach people how to live in a group, how to skill up and work together effectively and care for each other'*. She suggested that *'more re-skilling of practitioners would speed its [Transition's] uptake as a social movement'*.

Conflict

Although conflict is recognised as a normal phase of group development, as well as an opportunity for evolution of the group (Macnamara, 2012), this was not raised by participants as an issue that required the attention of their group. There was more an uninterrogated sense that the shared common purpose of Transition would dispel potential conflict. This was expressed by Tanya: *'If you've all got shared objectives then I couldn't imagine that you*

would not get consensus. If you're not, then there's something wrong with whatever it is that you're all discussing if you can't all agree on it, because you're all there for the same purpose'. However, as the examples below demonstrate there can be considerable conflict among people who seem to identify with a shared purpose. This suggests that assumptions need to be checked and that just having a shared purpose, which can be so broad that it obviates differences, is not sufficient. Transition initiatives aim to attract people who have not necessarily participated in social change before, and are representative of a wide political spectrum; therefore some degree of conflict could be expected.

Several participants described incidents where newcomers left Transition due to group dynamics that were not resolved. Laura conveyed an incident in her initiative where *'a young woman who had lots of good ideas and lots of energy felt that she was being put down by one of the group members ... and never returned'*. Dan, who was the convenor of his group, shared a similar experience where *'one person left quite early on because she felt really unsupported by me ... because I was so, in some ways, focused on what needed to be done that she felt completely missed'*. Andrew described a situation in his group where unspoken assumptions led to conflict and again, one of the members eventually left: *'Our group had some assumptions about who our target audience is ... and that split the group, caused disagreement, but it wasn't particularly named, it wasn't understood as being that'*. In each of these instances a lack of explicit dialogue between participants left the situations unresolved and a degree of discomfort remained about the incident. The research participants did not discuss gaining skills in conflict resolution or facilitation as potential approaches to any future conflicts in their groups.

Leadership

Another aspect of group dynamics that seemed to be problematic for some research participants was the carriage of ideas into practice. This relates to the notion of leadership which can be an area where progressive groups experience some discomfort, often due to lack of explicit dialogue about this issue (Epstein, 2002; Starhawk, 2011). Although most of the interviewees were part of their initiative's core group they did not refer to themselves or others using the language of leadership, except for Barry's comment below. One common approach described by research participants was that action depended very much on individual group member's passion and energy: *'It's pretty much like our group, really, very organic, and whoever has the energy will act'* (Transition HDHI). Similarly Leonie commented that in her initiative it would be left to one person, such as herself, who ultimately would carry out a task: *'Often I see a need for a job and just get in and do it'*. Barry explained that he often finds himself in the position of being the sole person bearing responsibility and that is not an ideal situation: *'If I ask for people to help and no-one responds, then, I'll do it myself, or it won't happen'*. He said that this was not model he was comfortable with: *'That's not leadership, that's just someone being a slave to everyone else really. Things get done, but people accept that they are being given permission not to do anything at the same time'*. Epstein (2002) describes similar experiences in the direct action movement where leadership is not problematised and then people who take on leadership roles can become 'bitter and burnt out due to criticism and no support, and the organisation can fail' (p. 346). On the other hand, Natalie decided not to pursue a project she felt passionate about as there was not enough enthusiasm or support from other people and she believes that carrying it on her own is not the purpose of Transition. She said *'no one else really wanted to do it. You need three people and then it'll stand. It might have happened if I threw myself in, but that's not the point.'* Tackling challenging issues such as leadership in creative ways seems to be important for Transition in modelling and developing alternative structures. For example, collaborative groups often work with multiple leaderships roles whereby leadership is not associated

with a particular person but instead roles or functions that can be rotated in ways that embrace a 'power with' rather than 'power over' approach (Starhawk, 2011; Warren, 2000).

Tensions

Overall, there seems to be some tension between *what* Transition participants do, and *how* they deal with working together through activities and projects. This appears to be an area of Transition riddled with contradictions, where a lack of reflexive practice risks group dynamics that perpetuate marginalisation within their groups and for newcomers. A healthy core group is described as an aspect of Transition under the mantle of inner Transition, yet there do not seem to be practices in place in many initiatives to enact this or encourage reflective practice. Phillipa was one of the few participants to mention reflection as part of their process: *'it's so important for us as a group to always be deepening and coming back to the centre, and reflecting and keeping that coherence, so that we can be really clear about our own values and what we are messaging'*. It would seem that there is conflict between the 'power of doing stuff', as Hopkins' (2013) most recent book is called, and the processes, or lack thereof, that inform the way that 'stuff is done'. Additionally, it seems that to ascribe the responsibility for group dynamics to the inner Transition dimension only, rather than as an integrated component of the Transition, is to place the responsibility on an aspect of Transition that is vulnerable to being sidelined or marginalised.

Burnout

As with many people engaged in social change, the propensity for Transition participants to keep working on Transition to the point of burnout is in part propelled by their belief that such work is important and worthwhile. Burnout is a common experience among activists who are often volunteers and lead already busy lives (Cox, 2011). Many of the research participants had thrown themselves into Transition with a sense of urgent enthusiasm, and a number of them were experiencing burnout themselves or observing it within their group. The causes of burnout in the Australian context seem to be associated with the inter-related issues of the voluntary nature of Transition, the lack of financial resources for most groups and the need for a greater number of active participants. Having insufficient active members in their core group was a common concern among research participants. As Transition HMI found: *'Critical mass is a major problem in a community that is already over-stretched when it comes to volunteer labour'*. The Transition THTB representative commented that they were doing well given that they *'are running on the smell of an oily rag'*, while the sentiments in the Transition STKV representative's comments were echoed by many: *'We could do everything better if we had more people/resources'*. Two of the survey respondents provided comments that indicated the potential for burn out in Transition: the Transition JFS representative wrote *'It's a tough slog'* and the Transition EDI respondent stated *'it's worthwhile but a killer!!'*. Several research participants described how core members of their groups left Transition after a period of taking on too much responsibility. For example, Bill said: *'People just seem to self-manage pretty well ... when it gets too hard they just disappear'* and he noted that this just increases the load for the remaining group members.

Although Transition is very demanding of people's time and energy, it is important to note that it also offers sustenance. For example, Andrew commented that participating in Transition enriches his life and gives it purpose: *'I find life a lot more satisfying when I'm doing this stuff, and I don't need sustaining, it sustains me'*. Amanda, who commented that she had recently burnt out herself, explained: *'The thing that I think is impractical is ... Transition groups can tend to introduce the same paradigm of unsustainability into their sustainability groups. So we've taken the position of being personally sustainable, and we'll do what we have the passion and energy to do'*. Amanda's comments mirror Banks' (2013, p. 6) prefigurative concern that there is a 'parallel dynamic' between depletion of

the planet and failure to replenish it, and depletion and lack of replenishment for Transition participants. She points out the centrality of burnout as an issue, arguing that in ‘any movement that seeks to create positive change ... whether we are working sustainably and creating a culture of sustainability within our groups is not a side issue, it’s central to what we’re doing’ (Banks, 2013, p. 5).

Polarisation

The incidence of burnout and stress experienced by core group members, as well as the focus on running projects as visible manifestations of Transition, can result in attainment of goals overriding the value of process and personal sustainability. As Phillipa observes: *‘Often activist movements are just using old paradigms and mindsets and creating more polarity ... and I think we are about a shift in values to co-create the type of society we want to live in, that’s going to sustain us, and more’*. The challenge of fitting Transition into their busy lives was a clear pattern in participants’ responses and perceived to limit the potential effectiveness of Transition. Dan, who said he had burnt out and was trying to find a way to balance Transition with his other commitments so that he could remain involved commented: *‘There’s a lot to do, Transition takes up a lot of my life and yet there are other priorities too; my family, general living, and work and trying to find a balance in life ... keeping up with the information about what’s happening in national and international agreements, or lack, of what’s happening locally ... trying to deal with emails, and support other groups and as well as run our own and trying different things’*. Brendon expressed that Transition has *‘become an obsession with me, it’s so part of my life’* but said that it was a considerable challenge for himself and his partner to fund their lives *‘while doing all this stuff for free’*. He said they wondered, given they have been the primary organisers of their initiative, what would happen when they leave the area.

The polarisation of inner Transition with practical actions was a notable response among participants. Although the Transition principle is outer and inner Transition, the latter is often perceived as something that can be done later. Comments from participants that reflect this approach include: *I think we feel the urgency to get action happening too much to feel we have time to engage with inner Transition’ and ‘we understand it but so far our focus has been more on the practical’ (Transition DH)*. Concerns about alienating their *‘conservative community’* meant that Transition SK chose to *‘stick to our mission statement which is on practical actions’*. Natalie was keen to integrate inner Transition into her initiative but there was not sufficient enthusiasm. She observed: *I don’t think there’s a consciousness that there has to be a relationship between community change and personal change. And I think people feel they don’t need to address that so much as “Let’s get the community moving”*. While this emphasis remains it is likely that Transition participants will continue to experience overwhelm and burnout through involvement in their Transition initiatives.

Conclusion

The sense that this is a critical moment in human history where current actions may determine the future of the planet creates a sense of urgency in movements for change, but the processes and relationships that underpin such are also critical. As a concept, Inner Transition can be understood as relating to the integrity of process (Ife, 2013) at all levels of functioning; individual Transition participants, local Transition initiatives and the broader community. However, research participants’ commentary around inner Transition demonstrates the challenges inherent in sustaining the importance of processes and the relational, when societal norms tend to polarise these with action. In many cases, the intent by Transition participants to incorporate inner Transition into their Transition

initiatives as a concept is subsumed by a focus on tangible activities. It would seem that rather than being considered 'core business', it is ascribed a peripheral status as one of those important things that need to be addressed, once the more important things have been done. This also means that an attunement to power dynamics and social relations is not an explicit part of the Transition social change project. Being in a progressive movement for change does not mean that 'exclusionary and oppressive' (Horn, 2009, p. 152) practices will not occur, and where there is a lack of critique of social relations in movements such practices are not necessarily challenged. Also, as can occur with inner Transition where only certain people take or are ascribed responsibility for maintaining an emphasis on process this can activate power relations. At issue, is a discourse that incorporates a prefigurative orientation, but practices that do not always support it. Maeckelbergh (2011) asserts that prefiguration 'posits a cyclical process of social change' which all participants are responsible for (p. 6). However, a lack of critical praxis in a movement can encourage a linear view of social change where the end point/s determine/s practice.

In discussing the community development field, which is not dissimilar to many social movements in intent, Ledwith and Asgill (2007) contend that the 'doing/thinking binary' which often occurs can result in 'thoughtless action' (p. 110). Instead, they propose the importance of the integration of doing and thinking, and action and reflection in a process of critical praxis informed by dialogue and sharing ideas and experience. Praxis assumes an interplay between theory and practice (Harcourt, 2006) and offers lenses for social movements to interrogate where they are maintaining integrity with their principles or ethos. Where social movements are intent on a prefigurative politics it is perhaps necessary to weave process more tightly into the fabric of their principles as praxis rather than being assigned a separate dimension, as in the instance of inner Transition. If Transition is to be a model for change then this is an area that could benefit from greater connectivity with existing knowledge bases. Although each initiative is responsible for how it chooses to function, ultimately it would seem that it is through the discourse of Transition, expressed largely through Hopkins' blogs, books and presentations, and the Transition Network publications and website, that the ethos of Transition is conveyed. Perhaps the Transition Network could model the value of engaging with praxis in terms of reflexive practice which could highlight issues such as those raised in this article.

Any perpetuation of dualistic thinking in practice is antithetical to a prefigurative politics. Luchies (2014) argues that an anti-oppression praxis 'refuses the traditional polarization between inter/personal and systems change' (p. 112). If we are too outcome focused then we are more likely to replicate aspects of the dominant paradigm that perpetuate some of the very things we wish to change. As such we can unintentionally marginalise those aspects of ourselves, our practice and our community that in their unity could actually enhance the transformative potential of Transition and other social movements. Dualistic thinking reinforces a 'power-over' mentality that inherently rejects plurality and therefore a lived sense of connectedness within our communities. Such dualistic thinking does not serve us in addressing issues which are inextricably linked to deep sustaining change.

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