Reclaiming the commons: a discourse for new politics

How grassroots activists are shaping the future

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Abstract

Where neoliberalism has encroached upon, privatised, destroyed or damaged commons, where it has limited or denied access to physical, economic, cultural and political spaces, then movements to reclaim spaces, to 'reclaim the commons', have emerged to counter these trends. This thesis argues that contemporary concepts of the commons help us to transcend the pro-capitalist/anti-capitalist dichotomy and to reconceptualise the political and economic sphere.

The examples of discourse and practice that this thesis explores illustrate both the emergence of the language of the commons from many different spheres of life and also its influence across a range of fields. The analysis includes a historical overview of the commons, while focusing on the evolution of the concept from the latter half of the 20th century to the present day, with the most recent material taken from events occurring in 2012. In the case-study, contemporary grassroots activists talk about their work and what the notions of the commons mean to them.

Through this vision, we recognise what is lost through the hegemony of ongoing capitalist appropriation, accumulation and exploitation of all aspects of life and reassert rights over - reclaim - that which has been lost. Through the struggle of all those involved in reclaiming the commons, a discourse for new politics emerges and shapes the future. This thesis suggests the emergence of a new discourse of the commons that makes possible a reconceptualisation of social, economic and political spaces.

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The Goose on the Common

A poem by Gerard Benson

(Written for the Developments Trust Association conference 2008)

The Law condemns the Man or Woman
Who steals the Goose from off the Common,
But sets the greater Felon loose
Who steals the Common from the Goose.
Anon

Common: Belonging equally to more than one.
Serving the use of all.
Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language, 1755

We do not own the earth.
Quaker Advices and Queries

So the task is to make a group of sonnets
on Trusts. Public ownership. Interesting.
And challenging. Not my usual kind of subject,
but stimulating. A community needs to invest in
its real wealth – its people. They're really something.
People and their gifts are our most potent assets.
It's not easy to steal from those who have nothing,
but it can be done. Look at the great Estates.
Is it a prerogative of the rich, to steal from the poor?
It seems, on the evidence that it may well be,
perhaps because it's the rich who frame the law.
Theft can even be presented as charity:
villagers' passages to the colonies paid by grand
benefactors, anxious to acquire more park land.

The poor are poor because the rich are rich.
We do not own the earth. We're here a while, then gone,
leaving the earth to others. But there's that morbid itch
to dominate by accumulation. It's often been remarked on.
How about Thomas Spence in the eighteenth century?
In 1775 he wrote — I quote. Listen. Please.
Great avaricious dominating companies
for their private ends disturb the peace

of the whole world, setting nation against nation,
and people against people. He wasn't speaking
of the armaments industry. His revelation
referred to cumulative capital, the making
of empires, not yet multinationals; just hosiers,
drapers, hatters, grocers. But who were the losers?

The rich are rich because the poor are poor.
It's a matter of distribution. —
"You can work my land
for me. My land. And obviously I'll take more.
It's a system that's worked since time out of mind.
And if my landed family can form an alliance
through marriage with another landed family,
then greater will be the share of my descendants.
Yours will be the ones to pay, unfortunately –
but we can't all be winners. It's the system you see.
Or if my trading company can marry into another
trading company, how very nice that will be,
and as for you – well, you'd better accept it, brother.
That's how it is. That's how it's done. That's how
it must always be. Always. … " But must it, now?

Must it go on and on the same?
What was that old rhyme, again?
The law condemns the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common,
But sets the greater felon loose
Who steals the common from the goose

So true. But somewhere along the line
Someone has added to the rhyme:
And still the geese a common lack
Until they go and take it back.

To take back the common from those with power
is a difficult job, but one worth the trying.
Landed power comes backed by armed force: the Tower.
Confinement. The axe. I think of John Ball dying
in the attempt. Wat Tyler, too. Beheaded. Pioneers,
striving, in the Peasants' Revolt, to bring equality
to the land. Since then there've been a host of others
at this same task. Thomas More, John Bellers, Gerrard Winstanley,
Tom Spence, Tom Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Emma Martin –
men and woman of action, writers, thinkers;
Robert Owen, William Morris, the mysterious "Captain

Pouch"; Levellers, Quakers, Moravians, Chartists, Diggers.
Some worked with the pen, some with spade, plough and rake,
some with visionary insight; Shelley, William Blake.
How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackening Church appals,
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

The common land is there for all to use,
likewise the common wealth, or common weal.
The fruits are ours to harvest if we choose.
If not, it's there for those with power, to steal.
We do not own the earth, but nor do they.
The earth's a subtle, complex eco-system
and should sustain us during our brief stay,
so long as we maintain it. We need wisdom
and generosity. We need to care.
We need to recognise reality.
The assets of the earth are ours to share,
so,too, the assets of society.
Our lands we must reclaim, our urban sites,
our village greens and halls – affirm our rights.

But how do we do it in this century?
We organise. Deploy the system. There are traps;
there can be setbacks; there can be difficulty:
waning enthusiasm, reticence, obstacles perhaps
to acquiring assets, problems with funding;
but with informed help and shared knowledge, most
problems can be overcome. Local communities fending
unsupported for themselves can become part of the past.
I think of Hanley Crouch, a laundry, squatted at first
by a group of neighbourhood parents, needing a place
for their children to play. Now it's a muti-purpose
Centre, open to all, of any age or race,
gender, religion, politics, orientation – a focal
point for community. Multifaceted. Thriving. Local.

And here's another thing about this century:
so much has altered in a hundred years.
There's been a vast upheaval in our demography,
social remodelling after two awful wars.
The globe has shrunk. Our island history,
once so white, so quintessentially male,
has changed for the better. Now it's a different story.
Now it's an altogether different tale.

Common ownership means (let me repeat
what Doctor Johnson says), Serving the use of all,
no longer the preserve of a privileged white elite,
but people of all cultures; the great, the small.
And ever at its root, the visionary venture,
like that disused laundry I mentioned before.

We need places like that, large, medium and small.
We need these popular enterprises. And it's easier now;
there's legislation to help. But we have to be practical.
Once we've obtained the assets (much like the cow
who must be fed if she's to give us milk)
we must look after them, nurture them, sustain,
maintain our buildings, not let them sink
into neglect. What was that rhyme again?
But still the Geese a Common lack, Until
they go and take it back. And then they've got to use it,
people it, exploit its full potential,
keep it in good trim, let nobody abuse it.
And that is why we have an Association,
sharing expertise and experience, spurring motivation.

Spurring motivation, and making sure
that when the goose is back on its own common
it thrives – and all the other geese, what's more.
And, since what I've called "geese" are really human,
and sometimes get above themselves, or fail,
or just give up, we need diversity
in managing our assets, to get a scale
of values, ideas, and points of view, not just to be PC.
We do not own the earth, but after all,
each on our patch, we need to mind it.
You must have seen that placard on the wall:
Please Leave This Place As You Would Hope To Find It!
That is the task of this Association,
to meet our common goals by free co-operation.

(Our Kingdom https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/collections/occupy)

Chapter 1

Introduction

The layers of meaning in the overlapping political, social and spiritual spheres that the days of the revolution witnessed have remained as a powerful legacy, inspiring the political imagination with new and renewed notions of agency, human nature and the power of the peaceful masses to change history. (Ezzat 2012:6, on the protests of 2011 in Tahir Square)

In this thesis I explore the concept of the commons as it has been developed in theory and especially in practice in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. I will draw attention to the extent and scope of the application and influence of the idea of the commons, and will argue that the significance of the commons in the present era lies in its mobilisation in activist political movements and in the rethinking of the contemporary political and economic landscape. The subject of the commons is developed through an examination of key texts from social history and political economy with particular reference to activism within civil society. The thesis considers a number of examples of activism and protest that have emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, to make the case for the political significance of grassroots activists as a force for change. Through a case study of interviews with seven UK based activists, I seek to identify the predominant characteristics of the contemporary uses of the language of commons amongst activists and consider the extent to which this demonstrates a shared discourse which informs and can provide coherence to apparently disconnected struggles. This study explores the possibility of describing the emergent political sphere of the early 21st century through the language of the commons.

The contemporary rise of the language of the commons occurs in the context of and as a reaction to the current phase – that might be called a specific ideology - of late capitalism which we know as neoliberalism. The doctrine of neoliberalism has remade the world, its advocates occupying so many positions of influence that neoliberalism has become hegemonic as a mode of discourse.

The question at the heart of this research is: does the concept of the commons, articulated in theory and in practice by writers and activists, provide a way of rethinking radical politics and a challenge to dominant neoliberal thinking.

If this is the case, then not only is the value of further developing our understanding of the commons confirmed, but also the importance of recognising the impact of those grassroots activists who have played a key role in defending and developing commons over the centuries and across the continents.

With a view to answering this question, my aims are:

· To clarify what is meant by 'the commons' in historical and contemporary political and academic debate and action

· To consider why the commons have become increasingly the focus of contention in contemporary political activism

· Through an analysis of the language of recent grassroots activism in writing and, through a qualitative study of the views of a sample of contemporary grassroots activists in the UK, to consider whether action over the commons is indicative of a new kind of politics and political identity

· On the basis of this study, to consider how important the 'reclaim the commons' movement is to the formation of a radical political alternative to neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism, Discourse and Agency

Central to this thesis on the commons lie critiques of neoliberalism, apparent in many aspects of what will be discussed in this study: explicitly articulated in protest movements; inherent in innovative social practices and economic models arising from civil society; and found as a common denominator of the many texts both from within and beyond academia that are reviewed. Hall reminds us that 'the term 'neoliberal' is not a satisfactory one' agreeing with critics of the term who argue that it is used to cover too much and thus complexities and specificities are lost. Nonetheless, he argues 'that naming neoliberalism is *politically* necessary, to give resistance content, focus and a cutting edge' (Hall 2011:10).

In the context of this thesis and the study of the commons, there are two elements of neoliberalism that need drawing out. Firstly there is the centrality of privatisation in neoliberalism, and its ever-increasing encroachment on human lives and spaces, in the

context of which ideas about the commons serve to bring into focus the possibilities of common or shared ownership. Particularly the privatisation – also referred to as the 'enclosure' - of common, public resources such as health and education services, material resources such as water and energy systems and biomedical and biological patenting have caused outcry and resistance in recent decades. This is the most recent manifestation of a historical process of capitalism. Secondly there is its hegemonic nature. Neoliberalism has effectively suffused the language of social and economic life with meanings that give primacy to private ownership and the marketisation of the social and cultural spheres to the extent that it is difficult to give meaning to alternatives. As Hall writes: 'in ambition, depth, degree of break with the past, variety of sites being colonised, impact on common sense and shift in the social architecture, neoliberalism does constitute a *hegemonic project'* (op cit:27).

The hegemonic nature of its influence and the wide acceptance that the neoliberal way of doing things is the only possible and natural way of doing things means that neoliberalism has come to represent the 'common-sense' approach for many people. Describing how neoliberalism is successfully sustained by a narrative that justifies its actions and makes any alternatives seem unfeasible, Dawson notes that 'culturally specific assumptions are portrayed as universal and logical' in the neoliberal era, and 'the only alternative to neo-liberalism, this framework suggests, is irrational reaction and stagnation, so there really is no alternative' (Dawson 2010:5). As the power of this idea comes to dominate our social and cultural as well as economic spheres, individuals are increasingly turned into individual consumers. Just as the commons provide alternatives to the model of private ownership – which as well as being central to neoliberalism also lies at the very roots of our legal and political system – so they offer an escape from the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism, speaking of other possibilities in a new language. The argument of this thesis is that activism, through reworking and creating meaning for commons, is generating a discourse of alternative possibility through practice; this research is seeking to determine the extent to which this might be the case. The activists themselves are important in this phenomenon because meaning is created through action and theoretical arguments are not sufficient.

Implicit in my use of the term discourse in this thesis is Foucault's (Foucault

(1972,1990, 2008) idea of the way language/discourse works in tandem with social practices to shape how we define ourselves and the social world we inhabit. Foucault argues that this happens in such a way that certain discourses become dominant and effectively construct a particular "episteme" (Foucault, 1972) or defining knowledge system at a particular moment in history, through which power is exerted. In tandem with this, alternative discourses are subjugated and marginalised. Despite his view in earlier work that the dominant discursive formation contains and constrains all rival discourse, in later work (eg Foucault, 1998, 2008), he suggests that such alternative discursive practices can offer potential for the hegemonic character of the dominant discourse to be resisted and challenged. The key feature of this process is the embedding of discourse in social practices. The formation of social practices and identities within the discursive field is not restricted to one dominant discourse, but is also subject to the competing discourses which open the path to change. As long as these competing discourses are given life through alternative social practices, the authority of the dominant discursive field may be weakened and alternative discourses can deliver empowerment to those engaged in those competing practices.

In this thesis, I will argue that the authority of the pervasive discursive authority and power of neoliberalism can be effectively challenged by the progressive strengthening of a competing discursive field around the central idea of the commons through activism and praxis.

Exploring alternatives to the neoliberal discourse encounters questions about epistemology and associated ontological problems. From time to time, our understanding of reality experiences a significant enough challenge for us to be able to say that our ontology – the question of what is 'out there' to know and how it exists – has been affected. One such example was Carson's book 'Silent Spring' (1962) which helped to bring into being the concept of the environment in the way that it has been used ever since. By bringing together a number of issues that had not been considered together before, Carson played a significant role in the development of the meta-language of new concepts of the 'environment' (Bollier 2007i:15), a new 'reality' that would have significant influence over human thought and activity in the decades to follow. An ontology – just like theories as discussed below - is not a neutral, objective existence that experiences natural and global evolution; vested interests

influence what we believe is and is not 'out there' to know; challenging how we know and what we know challenges the status quo. The hegemonic hold maintained by neoliberalism over our world view serves specific interests, but alternative epistemologies and their linked ontological shifts will represent other interests; Carson's work was thus a challenge to many of the practices common to modern agriculture and industry, for example; 'the environmental movement is a direct and intended threat to a sacred tenet of modern capitalism, the right to dispose of property in any way one pleases' (Albrow 2012:244). Today, in an era dominated by neoliberal hegemony, such challenges to the dominant world view are all the more needed and all the more remarkable. This thesis will explore whether the commons represent such a shift, building on Carson's which related to human knowledge of the natural environment to create an even broader ecological ontology - one that specifically ruptures the ideology of neoliberalism and allows us to draw together social, economic, political and environmental issues. To achieve greater understanding of this new ecology requires an interdisciplinary approach, while recognising insights from a range of academic disciplines. This is the approach adopted in this thesis, explored further later in this chapter.

In order to explore what Kostovicova and Glasius (2011) call 'agency-centred approaches to globalization' they advocate a 'people-centred approach' which 'makes an epistemological point concerning the knowledge that we as researchers can hope to glean about socio-political realities' (op cit: 14). They further note that 'this goes hand in hand with a radical rethink of the methodology of approaching the study of politics which 'demonstrates the importance of a neglected political arena, with its own set of actors, to our understanding of global politics, including a new understanding of progressive action resulting in emancipation from its adverse effects'(ibid). This emancipatory force at the grassroots of civil society, emerging from local contexts but finding common language and expressing solidarity far beyond national borders has shown us a 'global frame for citizen campaigns' (Albrow 2012:242); Albrow also notes the 'misrecognition and underestimation of the theoretical significance of those movements, their embodiment of an active global citizenship' (op cit:245). Through the activists who form part of this study, and in the language of the commons, a story is heard that gives meaning to alternatives. As we shall

see, these alternatives are often sought out in the absence of state-led initiatives to address social, economic and political concerns and crises of our times. These activists are the 'ordinary people' who lead this story of 'shared practices of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leadership and organization' (Bayat 2012: 15) What we understand by their 'agency' is the possibility they have of influencing the world. This agency is discussed in more detail in chapter five.

Global capitalism and enclosures; a lack of language to give meaning to a world in transition and the need for a discourse that brings together the cultural, the political, the economical and the environmental; finding those stories emerging at the grassroots of society; these themes run through this thesis. Occupy and other contemporary activists try to live out the realities they wish for rather than try to tell the world how we should move towards them, bringing new realities into the world through their actions and prefiguring the world they wish to see rather than describing it rhetorically. Similarly I am not only concerned with the outcomes of this research, but also with the way this thesis itself is written, and the priorities and choices that are made in its construction, which I hope will of themselves carry some of the meaning that I hope to transmit. I not only describe the subjects of my research as agents of change, I also see myself as author as an agent of change; this writing is itself a piece of activism, and an act of 'reclaiming the commons'. Acts of research and writing affect the world, as much or as little as any other event, and indeed take place in a context that in itself not unaffected by powerful trends:

> Similar to the ways in which public space has been taken over by states and corporations, we might consider how the intellectual spaces of social science have been colonized by particular methodologies and dominant forms of knowledge that eschew ethical sensibilities as peripheral to rigorous scholarship. Method wars are never just battles over methodology, they represent a fight over what can be seen, said and heard. (Hughes 2012:130)

For these reasons a discussion of the separation identified by some between academia and the 'real world' is included in this opening chapter; I hope that this writing will be a bridge across that artificial divide.

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That the Left has lost its way has become a much-heard commentary on the absence of an ideological alternative to neoliberalism as expressed by mainstream political parties. It has become difficult for the Left to articulate a vision of a traditional form of socialism when the concept of the working class is dissipated by changing work patterns, and other social and cultural change. Arguably, the fundamental terms in socialist discourse have been rendered meaningless. Attempts among academic and political classes to revive a socialist discourse, developing a language which has meaning within changing social relations by shifting the social basis for the meaning of socialism from a monolithic and generic working class to the diversity of identity politics and differently oppressed social groups, are only partially successful. The struggle is to find the ways to give meaning to alternative visions and the more powerful the anti-socialist discourse is, the more difficult this is.

It would seem at times as if the neoliberal discourse might be the only one to have survived the post-modern era which has introduced a profound questioning of the idea that any all-encompassing human stories could still be written. It seems ironic that one of the effects of this deconstruction, particularly of colonial and other elitist narratives, was perhaps to pave the way for neoliberalism – the ultimate colonising force - to sweep aside all other discourses, so that the entry of a new phase of capitalist expansion in the form of neoliberal globalisation met with relatively little ideological resistance along the way. Bauman (2008) argues that contrary to claims of the end of ideology, we are witnessing 'a curious twist in the idea of 'ideology': in defiance of a long tradition, there is now a widespread ideological belief that thinking about the 'totality', and composing visions of a 'good society', is a waste of time, since it is irrelevant to individual happiness and a successful life' (op cit: 20); he calls this 'an *ideology of privatisation'* (ibid).

A belief in the 'free market', and in the importance of GDP as the ultimate indicator of a nation's prospects, has united governments across political divides and has become the new, all-encompassing common sense; there can supposedly be no peoples or societies that can but benefit from participation in the global market place. In many cases, the long arm of the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) ensured that governments of postcolonial nations had little choice but to fall into line. This phase of capitalist accumulation – that continues to this day - is described in the language of

the commons as the latest wave of enclosures. As Dawson notes: 'Encapsulated in Margaret Thatcher's infamous quip that 'There Is No Alternative,' the cultural rhetoric of the new enclosures typically masquerades in the putatively objective, universalistic jargon of neo-liberal economics' (Dawson 2010:14).

One of the aspects of this ideology of the privatised, individualised society is that with this belief in the supremacy of the individual came a rejection of ideas of solidarity and of communal responsibility, as Bauman puts it; 'this ideology proclaims the futility (indeed, counter-productivity) of solidarity: of joining forces and subordinating individual actions to a 'common cause'' (Bauman op cit: 20). The activists whose voices we hear in chapter six – as well as those of others discussed throughout this thesis – stand in contradiction to this belief system. One of the outstanding themes of the interviews is the importance to the activists of communality and cooperation and the centrality of this in their activities. Just by coming together with a belief in the possibility of a common good and the intention to deliver it, they are countering the hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism; and several of them voice the importance of relearning how to work together.

Of course, there are and always have been many alternative visions and voices, as well as protest and resistance; neoliberalism does not carry out its mission without objectors. It is perhaps because the strength of those objectors has been judged by the visible success of their outcomes that it has been underestimated. This study argues that by looking a little deeper we find evidence of much activity, innovation and resilience at the grassroots.

In search of the commons

In the early 21st century neoliberalism has acquired a trail of vocal opposition emerging across the globe over the last few decades – perhaps symbolised by but certainly not limited to the motifs of the so-called anti-globalisation movement – and now finds itself struggling in the shadow of a financial crisis that forces ever more questions and doubts about its durability as a system, especially in the face of mounting evidence of the inability of governments to respond to critical environmental threats such as climate change.

Along the paths of resistance and in the search for alternatives, concepts of the commons have developed in the minds of many activists and theorists, and we find what we can refer to as a language of the commons emerging in both theory and practice. The following chapter will examine some instances of this in more detail. The commons both demand and suggest alternative conceptual frameworks and models of organisation which can be used to reform or radically alter capitalist systems.

Despite the long history of the word, and the wide variety of uses that the related word 'commons' finds itself serving today, the description given to the word 'common' by Samuel Johnson can certainly still be used two and a half centuries later (as does Benson in his poem for the Developments Trust Association, see preface) to convey the most important meaning that lies at the heart of its multiple contemporary uses: 'Belonging equally to more than one. Serving the use of all' (Johnson 1755). The commons can become a challenge to the legal and political structures of modern capitalist societies, and an inspiration for those searching for alternative structures for the organisation of economic, social and political life.

The word 'commons', historically and contemporaneously, denotes a particular model of access to, or use of, resources, whereby the resources themselves then become known as 'commons'. In its earliest form – which is the one that can still be identified by many people in the UK today – commons were areas of land to which access was open for the meeting of a variety of basic needs such as grazing and wood collecting. Most people today would correctly understand 'common' land as being land that is in some sort of public ownership; the south London Commons such as Wimbledon Common and Wandsworth Common are examples of this. What is less widely known by those who now enjoy the freedom to walk on these particular commons is that they owe this freedom in part to 19th century (and earlier) resistance to attempts at selling or enclosing parts of what was then privately owned land but to which people had common rights (who were known as 'commoners'). In Wimbledon, there were even protests 'when the Lord of the Manor felled oak pollards which had provided firewood for local folk, and sold the timber' (Bradley 2009: 36). This echoes issues raised by Marx in his article 'Debates on the Law on the Theft of Wood' in Rheinishe Zeitung in 1844, and discussed by Linebaugh (1976) in his article 'Karl Marx, The Theft of Wood and Working Class Composition' demonstrating that attacks by landowners on the perceived

ancient rights of local people were not confined to the UK but were at the same time local events and led to local protests and activism.

Over time, the commons have come to signify other resources, both physical and non-physical, that are shared, that is to say, that are accessed by people other than a legal owner. This occurs when the nature of the resource escapes or defies or needs protection or freeing from the reach of capitalist appropriation and the norms of private/corporate or state ownership that are typical of this model. A large body of academic work has researched traditional commons (also known as common pool resources) such as 'agriculture, fisheries, forests, grazing lands, wildlife, land tenure and use, water and irrigation systems, and village organization' (Hess 2008:1). More recently, a body of work has also begun to grow that uses concepts of the commons to describe a different sort of area. As noted by Hess, her work of 'professionally surveying the international, interdisciplinary literature on the commons' led her to identify in the early 1990s a growing number of articles on non-traditional commons, or what she called the 'new commons'; both these terms continue to be used to describe various types of shared resources that have recently evolved or have been recognized as commons. These include 'scientific knowledge, voluntary associations, climate change, community gardens, wikipedias, cultural treasures, plant seeds, and the electromagnetic spectrum' (ibid).

Across the many fields in which commons are identified and discussed, there is a little contention over what can be described as commons; all of the above and more are generally accepted as fitting the term 'commons'. As Hess noted about the emerging study of the commons: 'this vast arena is inhabited by heterogeneous groups from divergent disciplines, political interests, and geographical regions that are increasingly finding the term "commons" crucial in addressing issues of social dilemmas, degradation, and sustainability of a wide variety of shared resources' (ibid). It is taken beyond a technical application, however, by some commentators to become an expression of economic, political, cultural and personal visions as shall be explored further in the following chapters.

The commons is not a concept that is limited to academic discussion. Practitioners and activists as well as academics from diverse settings across the globe have found and are continuing to develop a shared language around the commons. As Dyer-Witherford noted

''the commons' is today emerging as a crucial concept for activists and thinkers involved in myriad mobilizations around the planet' (Dyer-Witherford 2001:965). A significant number of commentators have described a movement emerging around notions of the commons (e.g. Bollier 2007(i); Hawken 2007; Linebaugh 2008). Some have referred to this movement as one that seeks to 'reclaim the commons' (e.g. Barnes 2006; Klein 2001).

Demands for the protection of the commons go back in British history to early instances of resistance to the process of enclosures. Groups such as the Levellers and the Diggers offered an early articulation of an ideal of fairness through their demands for the rights of access to the commons which would provide a measure of rebalance in an already inequitable system that would serve to protect the livelihoods of the poor, if not elevate their standard of living to match that of the wealthy landlords:

> The earth (which was made to be a Common Treasury of relief for all, both Beasts and Men) was hedged into Inclosures by the teachers and rulers, and the others were made Servants and Slaves........Take note that England is not a Free people, till the Poor that have no Land, have a free allowance to dig and labour the Commons, and so live as Comfortably as the Landlords that live in their Inclosures.   (The True Levellers' Standard Advanced, 1649)

Demands of right of access to the commons embody social, economic, environmental and political ideals; concepts of the commons can articulate both a pragmatic approach to economic – and also environmental – issues, and also a vision of a fairer, more equitable society. Commons are not only the resource itself – whether material or immaterial – but are also a cultural construct, a social process, a relationship.

Diverse examples of practice and texts relating to the commons, drawn from many different fields, are brought together in this thesis for analysis. We find both our material and immaterial commons in need of new approaches to governance to ensure their protection and fair distribution; and we encounter a growing and vibrant movement of activists addressing this need. The rediscovery of the commons is acting as a stimulus and a unifying theme in instances of resistance to capitalist expansion and appropriation; growth in awareness of the commons contributes to the emergence of new forms of political consciousness that break away from the roles ascribed by capitalism.

This study does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of all of the world's commons or all the ways these commons are managed, or are related to and conceived of, or have been enclosed and reclaimed. Instead it describes a range of different examples of approaches to the commons that are being developed, put into practice and lived, illustrating the diversity of contexts in which we find commons being discussed, designed and debated. The prevalence and the diversity of the use of concepts of the commons – and also their historical tenacity and contemporary revival - are notable. In diverse ways and in a myriad of places, the language of the commons provides a vehicle for contesting the status quo in both the present and the future and for embodying different realities; the 'there is no alternative' era of the ideological, hegemonic domination of neoliberalism is undermined; the emperor with no clothes is challenged.

Looking for a language: some methodological reflections

This thesis takes us on a journey of discovery of the commons at many levels. There is an element of reflexivity as in the spirit of full disclosure I place myself as researcher, linking my study to the rest of my life. The journey of myself as researcher is included for the telling of it helps to illustrate the problems thrown up by some of the traditions of academia, which sometimes hinder research into grassroots community activism, creating barriers rather than bridges between the work of academic writers and the work of activists though there are some notable exceptions to this.

The postcolonial turn in ethnography is seeing this field opening towards 'expressing its own possibilities as a language of resistance and emancipation' (Clair 2003:19). Through writing stories, we can bring previously unarticulated realities to life, whether the subject matter is fictional or not, and conceive new meanings as we do so which alter the grip of existing realities. The nature of this research is inter-disciplinary, and I take my examples of the development of commons discourse and praxis from different spheres of real world experience and distinct fields of academia and place them together, in order to consider them in their totality.

As Hess noted above, the commons are a topic of study in diverse disciplines. Meanwhile some commentators reflect on the need for an increasingly interdisciplinary approach to tackling the challenging issues of our time. The editorial of an issue of the journal New Formations with a focus on engaging with ecological issues noted that 'it is only through a radical interdisciplinarity which can accommodate insights from geography, economics, cultural studies, anthropology, philosophy and the natural sciences that the questions our current predicaments pose can be properly addressed' (Gilbert 2010:7); and this journal included two articles and one work of conceptual art focused on the commons. As the study of the commons is a thread that runs through diverse disciplines then these threads can be drawn together to provide a basis for an interdisciplinary approach to some of the most urgent questions of our time through the lens of the commons.

An article by Matthew Reisz published in the Times Higher Education was entitled 'Disciplinary tribalism 'is stifling creativity'... Are students being short-changed by a narrow approach to learning?' The quote was from a paper given by Professor Gill Nicholls of the University of Surrey at the International Conference on New Directions in the Humanities in Granada, Spain. Reisz quotes Nicholls as describing how in a world of 'vast quantities of new information' academics 'to attain some kind of security, seek to come ashore on ever-smaller islands of learning and enquiry'. The notion of a discipline implies 'both a domain to be investigated and the methods used in that domain...emphasising characteristics that separate discreet units of knowledge as opposed to those that might relate them' (Reisz 2011). This leads to a situation where 'courses... effectively ignore the need for the student to explore and be creative' (ibid).

Isabelle Fremeaux noted in a short piece about a work-in-progress workshop she held at the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research on her film-book 'Paths Through Utopias': 'This project is inspired by the notion developed by many feminists (bell hooks 1994, 2003; Jean Barr 1999): emotions also encompass knowledge, learning involves an emotional as much as an intellectual process' (Fremeaux 2009). I have selected through a process of prioritisation, choosing whatever seemed to speak most loudly to me on the themes that I have put at the centre of this experiment in research. As a result, I have necessarily trespassed across the disciplines. I have included in the materials of my research pieces of work that result from a

range of approaches to knowledge and take many forms of expression, allowing some space for the creative and the emotional life alongside the more traditional inclusion of social, economic and political life; indeed without this inclusion, the understanding of the ideas and cultures that I seek to identify would not be possible.

Another risk posed to the aims of this research by the nature of academic traditions, as well as that of disciplinary tribalism, is a wider problem of language and access. A collection of short articles making up 'The Political Studies Guide 2011', which the New Statesman published as a supplement to its issue of 22nd November 2010, was sent out by the Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom (PSA) to its members in November 2011, with a publication marking sixty years of the PSA. Through several of the articles ran a thread of interconnected ideas relating to engagement of the general public in politics, to barriers to that engagement, and to protest and activism. It is of particular interest that the PSA should send this publication out, for in its opening article, the study of politics at universities is accused by the author of an 'abstruse and impenetrable discourse', and its lecturers of generally failing to communicate beyond the ivory tower. That the PSA was sending this message to its members at this time is evidence of an awareness of the need for developing new approaches that do not perpetuate this discourse.

In another of its articles entitled 'Talk human, please', Alice Miles reflects on the impenetrability of the language in which much academic debate is carried out and considers this particularly inappropriate in the area of political studies, because: 'Politics should be about communication as well as thought' (Miles 2010:4). She also notes a lack of engagement by British academics in this area of study with the outside world, as compared to the US; to illustrate her point, she compares a British lecturer who enthused about the quick turnaround of a particular journal – six months – with the publication of an electronic academic journal about the Obama health reforms two weeks after the vote. As she summarises: 'Six months! The political world has moved on by then. Academics who are concerned with politics or policy should be in the papers every day, commenting, questioning, explaining. And in language that ordinary people can understand' (ibid). Shapiro describes the existing approach within the academy as one of 'manufacturing esoteric discourses with high entry costs for outsiders' (Shapiro 2007:189).

This disengagement was made evident in the paucity of response from International Relations scholars to the financial crisis, as one study identified: 'one would expect an explosion in literature from the discipline that claims academic monopoly over the international sphere: International Relations. However, as our research shows, surprisingly few IR scholars have made any attempt to analyse the crisis' (Manokh and Chalab 2011:2). The authors argue that the academic field of International Relations (IR) has by and large been incapable of responding to the latest financial crisis (as evidenced by a review of works published in major IR academic journals over the previous four years) because of the limits imposed by the dominant orthodoxy within the discipline. It would seem to be the case that 'political science and sociology are equally in danger of being left behind in the rapidity of contemporary change (Albrow 2012:243).

The problem of challenging the status quo experienced to a degree across academia is particularly evident in the field of International Relations. It might be expected that scholars in this field would concerning themselves with the global wave of protests and popular uprisings that were experienced in many parts of the world in 2011, as they should have been concerned with the global financial crisis that came before it. In the publication by the Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom referred to earlier, another contributor who wrote about the relevance of political studies commented that 'the importance of political studies, invariably cross-disciplinary in nature and encompassing sociology, anthropology, economics and history is more and more credible' (Heywood 2010:20). This suggests its potential, despite the limitations that have been mentioned.

Discussing the constraints felt by academics generally, Wyn Jones concludes that 'one would be naive to understate the difficulties facing those attempting to develop alternative critical approaches within academia' noting among other aspects to this the constraints imposed by the 'requirements for job security and marketability' that render academics risk-averse (Wyn Jones 1999:162). He comments on the particular difficulty for accounts that

fundamentally challenge the status quo to arise out of the discipline of security studies, due to the difficulties inherent in a field in which traditionally the main agent is the state, and in which 'even the language....militates against any attempt to present alternative accounts of reality or alternative possibilities for the future' (op cit: 146).

Commenting further on the role of intellectuals in the emancipation process, however, he notes the influence of 'dissident defense intellectuals' in the peace movement of the 1980s, and specifically on their relationship with activists; for they 'encouraged and drew strength from peace activism. Together they had an effect not only on short-term policy but on the dominant discourses of strategy and security, a far more important result in the long run' (op cit: 156). However, he also notes that 'any attempt to create an alternative discourse in the field of security—and in particular any attempt to problematize the role of the state as the provider of security—is likely to be strongly resisted' (ibid).

Wyn Jones notes also the 'disproportionate impact made by the numerous "conversions on retirement" undergone by those previously prominent in the security field' as further evidence of the difficulty for voices from beyond the discipline's boundaries to be heard 'because they lack the basic legitimacy required in the contemporary culture of experts' (op cit: 147); even when the arguments are identical, the 'expert' voices are given far greater weight. This point reinforces the image of an academic field as an ever-narrowing area of expertise whose boundaries are impermeable, thus limiting the possibility of inter-disciplinary approaches, as well as one in which academics may refrain from challenging the status quo for professional reasons, waiting until retirement to voice their dissent. As he suggests, in an academic field whose main concern has traditionally been national security and the main actor the state, and in which academics may have close ties to security establishments, 'it may be valid to posit the existence of what has been called the military-industrial-academic complex' (ibid).

The most extreme example of such collusion is evidenced in the work of the 'embedded' journalism that has characterised press reporting, through which the media was the spokesperson for the British government, feeding the public the information – or misinformation - that the government wanted it to hear. For one account of this see John Pilger's film on the Iraq war 'The War you Don't See' (Pilger 2010). While a closer look at this

unethical relationship between the media and the state lies beyond the limits of this research, this issue should not be ignored in the context of this discussion. Particularly relevant to this research is the effect of the developments in telecommunications, making it now harder for governments to control the images and the information received by the public. The consequences of this power shift are profound. The impact of these developments and of new social media more widely – essentially the power of the mobile phone and the internet combined, and the ability this gives for images to be directed straight out to the world at large by non-professional civilians – is an empowering tool of civil society: 'It is becoming increasingly difficult for ruling elites, usually located at the national scale, to play the gatekeeper role, through traditional territorialized hierarchies, with regard to information and communication flows across space' (Cumbers et al 2008:188).

One of the plenary lectures at the annual conference of the Political Studies Association 2011 was given by Nic Gowing, a main presenter for the BBC's international 24-hour news channel BBC World News since 1996. Describing the power shift brought about by new technologies, Gowing argued that the new social media is bringing about a dramatic change in public information space, and is a driving force behind a new wave of democratisation and shifts in power relations between people and the state. In his book on the subject, he explores the impact of what he calls the 'information doers' with their 'go-anywhere' technologies (Gowing 2009). At a conference held by the European Association for University Lifelong Learning (EUCEN) entitled 'Education as a Right – Lifelong Learning for All!' the opening key-note speech was given by Federico Mayor-Zaragoza, who held the post of General Director of UNESCO 1987-1999 among other roles in his career. He proposed that the 21st century would be the 'century of the people'; one of the reasons he gave for this prediction was the vastly increased ability for citizens to express themselves through the internet and via their mobile phones. He expressed his belief that for the first time in history, it really was within the power of ordinary people to change the world. He also stressed the crucial contributions that academic and scientific communities had to make towards managing the challenges of this historic shift.

It is hugely problematic for IR to turn its attention to and recognise the importance of non-state actors such as the activists and protestors of new social movements. As we have

seen there is evidence that academics, who we can see as the actors in the academic field, help to preserve the status quo that they are engaged with professionally. As Walker notes, to recognise 'how social movements might be relevant to the emergence of some kind of world politics' is to confront the 'prevailing codes of modern political discourse' which is 'one that affirms the priority of the principle of state sovereignty over all other claims to political possibility' (Walker 2005:137). This, argues Walker, explains why the study of social movements has been dominated by sociologists rather than students of politics: for the latter are typically limited by the 'narrow readings of what counts as political practice' of their field (op cit: 142). Yet just as activists and social movements not only challenge the social, economic and political status quo but also prefigure alternatives and embody new models in their language and through their actions, so should academic researchers writing about them challenge the status quo of an academic discipline such as IR and contribute to a breakdown of the dominant orthodoxy: 'Human society urgently needs a security studies that goes beyond problem-solving within the status quo and instead seeks to help engage with the problem of the status quo' (Booth 2005:10). Just as activists and protestors are often described as demonstrating a prefigurative politics, that is, ways of working that reflect the society that is sought after (Ghandi's instruction to 'be the change you want to see in the world' has become a much-used slogan among activist groups), so, perhaps, can this thesis be a case of prefigurative writing, attempting to embody and exemplify a new approach. Just as the grassroots activism of the 21st century is emerging in a new leaderless form, without prescriptive ideologies that all must adhere to but showing inclusive, horizontal models of behaviour, so the researcher might consider attempting something similar: not necessarily to try and present a new orthodoxy, but rather to create the space for something new to emerge that highlights the shortfalls of the status quo.

State centric Realist analysis still tends to dominate both academic and 'real world' International Relations and, Liberal-Pluralist challenges, whilst recognizing the growth of transnational politics, have usually still been constrained by a positivist methodology seeking to quantify the influence of organized actors. Missing from such analyses tends to be individual agency and the global spread of ideas challenging the powerful. Post-positivist approaches such as Critical Theory thus help us better appreciate broad, loose, transnational

movements of the apparently powerless. As Booth notes, 'one of the tragedies in the history of the study of international relations has been the way in which an ideology (a theory of the powerful, by the powerful, for the powerful) has appropriated the cloak of objectivity and practicality' (Booth 2005:6). This cloak, however, is looking increasingly patchy at the start of the second decade of the 21st century. I heard an activist in 2011 describe how in the current times, cracks in the edifice of the status quo had opened, providing an exciting and historic opportunity for alternatives to be heard and to take leverage; so perhaps it might be the case in the academic discipline too. A blog and Facebook page called OccupyIRtheory/IPE was started in 2011 by a group of academics that was partly in support of and partly motivated by the Occupy movement: the academics involved felt that the Occupy movement not only called them to express their support but also challenged them to reflect on their position and purpose as academics. Reflecting on the field of IR one comment on the new page (by Manokh, see above p.14) read: 'For IR the crisis simply has not happened which demonstrates that there is an urgent need to 'occupy IR' - to rethink its ontological and epistemological foundations'. Both the Occupy movement and the OccupyIRtheory/IPE Facebook page are examined in more detail in future chapters.

Such a project is not, of course, without any academic tradition. Critical theory challenged hegemonic thinking and brought us the concept of agency, potentially a more empowering approach than Marxist theories which did not vest the people it was concerned with, the working class, with such agency. Critical theory was intended by its originators to be an emancipatory project, and continues today in the same tradition. Its focus on agents for change as well as its emancipatory ambitions makes critical theory a particularly relevant perspective for this study. The recognition of the impact of the technological revolution and new social media by the plenary speakers mentioned above – and many others - is recognition of the power of agency that such developments have brought with them, as was borne out in the extraordinary popular protests of 2011.

Critical theory reminds us of the normative values that lie behind theory. Positivists would say that it is only the 'job' of IR to reflect the world as it 'really is', not to be concerned with questions about the nature of the world that is being created (other than whether states can be 'secure'). Concerns about whether economic and political systems favour a

small elite and are environmentally damaging, for example, are not considered part of the remit. Critical theorists both question the possibility of such neutrality and discard the desirability of neutrality.

As Cox famously wrote, theory is always '*for* someone or *for* some purpose' (Cox 1981:182)*.* Carson's work (see above p.3-4) was not a neutral project; she set out to point to the various ways in which the health of humans and of the natural environment was being damaged by industry and modern farming methods. We can say that Carson's expose was 'for' the natural environment and for its safeguarding against its use and abuse by humans; Marxist theory is for labour, for the empowerment of labour versus capital. If we are to think about developing a theory of the commons, then, the question must be posed – for whom and for what purpose? Some anti-capitalist commons theorists such as Caffentzis and Federici see it as essential that a theory of the commons is for labour and against capital. The way the Occupy movement adopts the language of the commons suggests that we could simply say that a commons theory would be 'for the 99%'. I will explore these arguments further through the literature review given in chapter three and in the final two chapters.

A goal strongly associated with the work of critical theorists is emancipation, turning the tide of positivist approaches in social theory characterised by claims of objectivity and neutrality. While this approach represents a welcome turn in academic fields including IR, it would be a problematic concept to attach to this thesis, at least without further discussion and qualification. The purpose of emancipation that critical theory espouses would serve to define the purpose of a theory of the commons but with some questions and a suggested update. Firstly, the question of who is emancipating whom, and the possible assumptions that are made in this regard, raises concerns. Secondly, and not unconnected to this concern, equity might replace emancipation as the purpose, or perhaps become the next step, that is, equity become the purpose of emancipation.

In critical theory we have the problem at its core of whose voice we hear through it; despite its revolutionary impact on the social sciences, one must now ask oneself: emancipation for whom and by whom? Wyn Jones does not comment on the separation implied between those who need emancipating and those who are in a position to do the emancipating – the intellectuals in this instance – so offers no reflection on the following

position: 'the project (that) stands full-square within the critical theory tradition. If "all theory is *for* someone and *for* some purpose," then critical security studies is for "the voiceless, the unrepresented, the powerless," and its purpose is their emancipation' (op cit: 159, quoting Said (1994)).That emancipation can be assumed to be derived by players in academia – mostly white, male Westerners at that - for the world at large is an unacceptable premise for this thesis. Indeed the approach that any one person may be able to help another towards emancipation is laden with assumptions not confined to the academic field. I have for example heard young activists expressing the desire to help the general public become emancipated, making the assumption that they themselves are emancipated (for which you can almost read enlightened) and the general public are awaiting their help to become emancipated.

Nonetheless, critical theory is still useful to a discussion over activism and the commons, given its emphasis on discourse, human agency and its rejection of positivism, and so a theory of the commons can build on the critical theory perspective. One of the central issues that the Occupy movements brought to the world's attention was that of equity, or rather the lack of it. A suitable update for critical theory's goal of emancipation may be derived from observing how levels of inequality have grown in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Statistics that describe this global condition include comparisons of the salaries of company directors with that of their average employee, and comparisons of the annual turnover of the world's largest corporations with national GDPs (OECD 2011).

The world is currently desperately in need of finding new ideas and new models through which to imagine and construct a future for humanity in which we move away from the levels of extreme inequality that are currently manifested. To date there has been no development in the discourse of the left to answer this critique; if anything the financial and economic crises have only served to further highlight its inability to describe any alternatives, any vision. Wyn Jones sums this up, reflecting that the effects of the rapid increase in global inequality are 'nothing less than cataclysmic. And yet despite this, those forces that resonate to the progressive democratic impulse are apparently catatonic. With very few exceptions, the left has little to offer' (Wyn Jones 2001: 19); more than a decade later, there has not been much change. An absence of vision or language in which radical change can be

conceived does not only characterise academic and political circles but also describes more generally the success of neoliberalism in proving itself to be the only possible reality, ensuring the loss of alternative stories and language and vision to describe the world, and ultimately making us forget the possibility that alternatives may even exist; and we should not underestimate the forces invested in the securing of the status quo. Referring to Graeber (2011(i)) Vrasti note that 'in killing the radical imagination we are doing the work of capital, which has a lot of resources invested in having this 'machine of hopelessness' prevent us from imagining alternative worlds' (Vrasti 2012:123). This sentiment is borne out by the limitations experienced within academia that have been explored in this chapter, felt particularly strongly but not exclusively within the field of IR: 'The nagging feeling that academics have lost the ability to contribute to real life struggles and that the university is no longer the birth place of radical thought and action is not something endemic to IR' (op cit: 121).

However, vision and language are emerging from the grassroots, in a way that has gone largely unrecognised, unresearched and undervalued, until perhaps very recently. It is easier to be new, different and to think and act in innovative ways in the freedom found on the fringes; if academia does not harbour space for the 'fringes' then inevitably new praxis and discourse will emerge from outside academia, leaving academics, as Vrasti puts it, as 'temporarily embarrassed intellectuals trying to do something of a 'reality check' when confronted with a phenomena such as the Occupy movement' (ibid).

Opening up to a trans-disciplinary approach has given me a flexibility that has helped to ensure that what I studied would not be limited by what I could see, say and hear from within a particular methodology; thus, echoing Booth, ensuring that the aim of the thesis could act as the guiding principal. I noted that among other things the language of academia can act as a barrier to participation; that the academic fields of politics are particularly guilty of failing to participate in and comment on the crucial contemporary 'real life' issues upon which their fields are centred, particularly in the UK; and that partly as a result of narrowly defined research methods acceptable to academia for the production of reliable 'data', much of what is happening in the real world that is relevant to the field they pertain to be specialists in simply passes below their radar.

This thesis attempts to transgress these limitations in order to highlight possible sources of trends and forces, emerging through the work of grassroots activists and synthesised around the discourse of the commons that do begin to articulate new meanings and thereby to define a new politics. Through chapters two and three the story of the commons unfolds and in chapters four to six attention is given to the activists who are reclaiming and occupying commons. In the final two chapters a more in depth analysis is offered of the political significance of 'reclaiming the commons'. Chapter two introduces the wide range of fields in which commons have been identified. By means of the literature review in chapter three, a more in-depth discussion of the ideas that emerge from a range of approaches to the commons is presented. Chapter four provides a broader look at activism and protest, reflecting on some of the recent protests that have taken place in London and beyond. Chapter five considers more specifically the contribution of grassroots activists to the emergence of a commons discourse. Chapter six offers a summary and analysis of interviews conducted for the purposes of this study with some grassroots activists. In chapter seven, the apparent conflict between proponents of pro-capitalist commons and anti-capitalist commons is evaluated, and concludes that such positioning is out-dated, describing how concepts of the commons help us to surpass this dichotomy. I make the case that concepts of the commons represent a significant influence on the future of capitalism, and provide a discourse for new politics. Chapter eight concludes the thesis by describing a theory of the commons with particular reference to the Occupy movement and with a focus on developing a theory of the commons as a theory of access. A concern that lies at the heart of this thesis is an empowerment of a collective impulse at the grassroots of society. We will hear the term 'empowerment' being used in many instances by the activists interviewed as part of this research in chapter six. The theory of the commons developed in this thesis describes the power of this impulse to materialise, organise, and articulate itself. By doing so it creates alternatives to neoliberal discourse and practice – or the neoliberal 'way of doing things' – and so undermines the hegemony of neoliberalism.

Chapter 2

Exploring the Commons

Just as early industrial capitalism enclosed the commons of land and labour, so today's post-industrial capitalism is enclosing the cultural and intellectual commons (both real and virtual), the commons of the human mind and body, and the commons of biological life. (Rutherford 2008:13)

This chapter and the next offer an analysis of the growing use of the word commons. In a paper by Hess (2008) she documents this trend and calls for a development of this work to be taken forward: 'I leave it to future scholarship to evaluate the importance and legitimacy of all these new types of commons. I hope this study makes the case that the trend toward new ways of applying the commons to contemporary sectors, communities, and issues deserves our attention' (Hess 2008: 4). This thesis gives the attention to this growing trend that Hess calls for.

A full literature review covering all the areas that will be pointed to in this typology of the commons would be impossible within the scope of this work. Therefore, following the typology given in this chapter, the work will begin to narrow its focus through a selective literature review in the next chapter, making particular reference to texts that illustrate the development of the discourse of the commons, and which will help to map the development of the new political concepts that are being constructed through this discourse. In chapters four, five and six the work of grassroots activists linked to the development of the discourse is considered.

The significance of the commons

If we consider that in the 21st century we live in a world that is dominated by a global capitalist economic system, in which everything has become a resource, then we can say that as a consequence of this, our relationship with all the material, and even to some extent the immaterial, fabric of our lives is affected if not dominated by the dynamics of capitalism;

control of the access to the physical and non-physical 'resources' we need to live our lives encroaches upon almost every aspect of our life on this planet. This notion gives us a hint of the breadth of the applicability of the concept of 'the commons' in the modern-day world and the relevance of the discourse that it engenders.

For the 'commons' discourse provides an alternative to the neoliberal discourse; the 'commons' relationship replaces the capitalist relationship; 'commons' thinking is a reinvention of relationship, an affirmation of faith in, and a recognition of the need for, collective action. Notions of the commons are being used in approaches to the management of resources which prioritise social and environmental justice, providing a reformative tendency to neoliberal capitalist exploitation. They are found in responses to emerging issues about the management of the 'global' environment, through the concept of the 'global commons'. When the word 'to reclaim' is added (a verb with both transient and intransient uses), we find ourselves looking at the exhortation 'reclaim the commons' that describes a concept suggesting activism and radicalism. The message of some Occupy activists to 'occupy everything' (see p. viii) is a more recent manifestation of this.

Use of the term spans the political arena from reformative to radical approaches to capitalism. Peter Barnes is a social entrepreneur and writer who uses the word 'commons' in his proposals for reforming capitalism; David Bollier is another activist, writer and strategist to focus his work on developing reformative models around concepts of the commons. Bollier was a founder editor of *On The Commons*, which describes itself as 'a commons movement strategy center, we connect organizations, community leaders and individuals with new ideas, practical solutions and one another to create significant change' (On the Commons 2010). Others such as George Caffentzis and Massimo De Angelis take a radical approach. They set out to wrench the concept of the commons back from what they consider to be a take-over by neoliberalism, seeing irreconcilable contradictions between capitalism and notions of the commons (e.g. Caffentzis 2005, 2010; De Angelis 2009). De Angelis is editor of a UK-based electronic journal called *The Commoner*, which is described by one of its regular contributors Silvia Federici as 'a key source on the politics of the commons and its theoretical foundations' (Federici 2011). Federici is another writer who insists that commons theory must be anti-capitalist: 'We must be very careful, then, not to craft the discourse on

the commons in such a way as to allow a crisis-ridden capitalist class to revive itself, posturing, for instance, as the environmental guardian of the planet' (op cit). These authors are reviewed in the literature review in the following chapter, and also in a more in depth discussion of this capitalist/anti-capitalist dichotomy explored in chapter seven.

Another writer who has included the use of a concept of the commons in her work is Naomi Klein, for example in a talk about the anti-globalisation movement entitled 'Reclaiming the Commons' (Klein 2001). Questioning the use of both terms 'anti-globalisation' and 'movement', she instead describes the opposition to the 'forces' of privatisation as 'taking form in many different campaigns and movements. The spirit they share is a radical reclaiming of the commons' (Klein 2001:82). Chapters four, five and six are dedicated to exploring the work of such activists.

Hilary Wainwright uses the verb 'reclaim' in the title of a book about progressive participative democracy at the grassroots, *Reclaim the State: Experiments in Popular Democracy* (Wainwright 2003). In her editorial of the April/May 2010 issue of *Red Pepper*, Wainwright notes the need 'to develop a vision of embedded public institutions drawing on recent thinking about the commons and participatory democracy. It's about starting from and interconnecting the new or hybrid sources of non-state power that so many of us are involved in' (Wainwright 2010). This study is an analysis of these 'sources of non-state power' – which is also a non-corporate power, and has been described by David Bollier as 'a third force in political life, struggling to express its interests over and against those of the market and the state' (Bollier 2007(ii):33). This study brings together numerous examples of how this 'force' has expressed itself in recent decades, in order to assess how it is continuing to develop, and where it might lead us. This is achieved through a theoretical analysis of the discourse of the commons, illustrated by some examples of what the 'us' mentioned by Wainwright are doing and showing how grassroots activism is a vital ingredient of this trend.

The contemporary development of a discourse around the commons is a response to the growth of corporate power versus that of the individual, and to the failure of governments to include and give voice and representation to all people equally, which has brought about a crisis of confidence in democracy generally as well as in our politicians themselves. More broadly it is possible to identify the emergence of a discourse that is used

right across the political spectrum as a challenge and an alternative to neoliberalism in all areas of human life – political, economic and cultural. The links between the emerging discourse of the commons, the role of grassroots activists in this, and the search for new invigorated forms of democracy will all be explored in order to answer the question – how is the emerging discourse of the commons, in which grassroots activists have played a key role, contributing to new politics? In a political world in which we live with 'neoliberal discourse's own pretence to normative universality' (Couldry 2010: vi), where we are slipping back almost to a pre-critical era of assuming that the world evolves in a natural evolution rather than by being shaped by specific interests and powers – and that globalisation is a neutral force, a natural development - it is vital for the survival of democracy that we reassert a discourse of empowerment.

In the opening paragraph of his detailed study of Magna Carta and the lesser known Charter of the Forest which was drawn up concurrently, Peter Linebaugh refers to 'the planetary movement to "reclaim the commons"' (Linebaugh 2008: xiii). Where did this movement begin and what does it signify? What exactly is it that is being reclaimed, and by who? Linebaugh states that 'elements of the commons have never been far away' (ibid). By referring to 'the suppressed praxis of the commons in its manifold particularities, despite a millennium of privatization, enclosure, and utilitarianism' (op cit: 19), he draws our attention to the history of the commons and their contemporary existence. We will now explore in some more detail what is meant by this term 'to reclaim the commons', using this study as a means of looking at the emergence of a new discourse of democratic participation in the 21st century.

An enduring term

The following extract from the poem written for and read at the Development Trusts Association (DTA) 2008 Conference by Gerard Benson (see preface) also reminds us that the concept of 'the commons' has threaded a path through British history, at times being all but lost but now re-emerging with some measure of strength and clarity. The text in italics is

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itself extracted from an anonymous English protest chant, circa 1600, objecting against the British Monarchy's habit of building fences around and on land that was previously public (Duhaime 2009):

> Must it go on and on the same?
> What was that old rhyme, again?
> *The law condemns the man or woman*
> *Who steals the goose from off the common,*
> *But sets the greater felon loose*
> *Who steals the common from the goose*
>
> So true. But somewhere along the line
> Someone has added to the rhyme:
> *And still the geese a common lack*
> *Until they go and take it back.*
> (Benson 2008)

The DTA's website describes development trusts as follows: 'Development trusts are community enterprises working to create wealth in communities and keep it there. They trade on a 'not-for-personal-profit' basis, re-investing surplus back into their community and effecting social, economic and environmental, or 'triple bottom line', outcomes' (DTA 2010). This description of development trusts provides us with just one example of what a model of 'the commons' can look like in 21st century Britain. The word 'commons' does not appear here or indeed anywhere on the DTA's website other than in Benson's poem, and development trusts probably emerged without any consciousness of the discourse of the commons. Nonetheless, these organisations are an example of Bollier's 'third force' and it is notable that the poet/story-teller Benson, when asked to write a poem for the Association's conference, felt that he could express the spirit of the Association and illustrate its purpose and its wider relevance to our society by linking it with the long history of the struggle over the commons.

The commons go back further than the 17th century, but that a protest poem can endure even for four hundred years and re-emerge with meaning and relevance in an apparently vastly transformed society, is an indication of the enduring need for what the commons represent, and suggests that a theme emerges in the struggle over the commons

which may be found to run through the social, political and economic history of Britain, a theme which has a renewed relevance and urgency in the social, political, economic and environmental circumstances of the present day. An understanding of community – and how a community functions in terms of sharing resources – lies at the heart of the concept of the commons, and though what that community is and what community signifies has changed significantly through the centuries, still society must grapple with the same issues which Benson describes in the rest of his poem, that is to say the protecting – or reclaiming – and the using of resources, or land/space, by a (communal) 'many' where a powerful elite may endeavour to take, or have taken, control. This may not be a self-conscious community, but a community of users sharing a space or a resource; and it is the act of using, or accessing, that denotes a commons, not the community itself. This idea of access will be returned to in the final chapter.

A concern that lies at the heart of this thesis is an empowerment of a collective impulse at the grassroots of society. We will hear the term 'empowerment' being used in many instances by the activists interviewed as part of this research (see chapter 6). The theory of the commons that is developed in this thesis describes the power of this impulse to materialise, organise, and articulate itself. By doing so it creates alternatives to neoliberal discourse and practice – or the neoliberal 'way of doing things' – and so helps to undermine the hegemony of neoliberalism.

The emerging meaning

In order to devise a typology of the growing areas of research and multiplying uses of the concept of 'the commons' that will serve as a back drop for the development of this thesis, we can divide up the use of the concept into three broad areas of use. Concepts of the commons are used to describe the organisation of: land; other natural resources; and knowledge & information. While all areas of life may be reduced to being considered as resources in the capitalist model, there are clearly enough differences between the nature of

these 'resources', that they can be divided up and grouped accordingly into these three separate areas, each of which contains numerous further sub-divisions which I will describe.

Firstly, the commons denotes land, either land in common ownership, or land to which access is permitted for certain usages by persons other than the land-owner, indeed where that access & usage has legal status giving the persons rights of usage that override the rights of private property. We have a long history of commons as right of usage of land in the UK, protected in Magna Carta and the lesser known Charter of the Forest and playing a central part of feudal agricultural production, progressively eroded through the centuries but also fiercely defended and resilient to the point of maintaining and in some cases regaining some legal status, and even re-emerging through new assertions of modern constructed rights to the usage of land such as the right to ramble.

Secondly, the language of the commons has been widely used to discuss the environment itself and the world's natural resources. This includes the management of fisheries, forestry, and water resources, as well as the 'global commons' and 'atmospheric commons' in the context of the global environmental crisis: resources that we all 'share', and can be polluted or otherwise damaged by some users to the detriment of the rest of the population, hence demanding new perspectives and new values in global governance: '…climate change reveals the problem of what constitutes a 'global community', of who speaks for it, who decides for it' (De Angelis 2009).

The third 'type' of 'commons', the knowledge and information commons, refers to shared and open use of and access to information & knowledge resources. Long-held traditions of sharing the development of knowledge and the outcomes of research are evolving into new ways of organising and protecting these traditions, partly as new means of networking and sharing information have emerged through the development of the internet. However, it is also the case that such organisation increasingly becomes necessary to protect public 'ownership' of or access to knowledge and ideas as the reach of corporate power threatens free and open access to knowledge. This growing encroachment is evident in a multitude of areas, such as in the legal processes of privatisation and patenting. The control and use of the media is also an important issue in this area: access to the airwaves may be tightly controlled, but again the World Wide Web has provided an open forum for the

exchange of news and opinions, leading to a revolution in how we get our information, share and access knowledge, form our opinions and network with each other. Under this type of commons we can also include 'cultural commons'.

Existing resources & expertise

There is already substantial consciousness of the value of the concept of the commons across a range of research areas. A Digital Library of the Commons has been created at Indiana University, providing a gateway to the international research on the commons. The research into the Commons that it has archived is divided into the following sector-titles:

> Agriculture
> Fisheries
> Forest Resources
> General and Multiple-use Commons
> Global Commons
> Grazing Areas
> History
> Information and Knowledge Commons
> Land Tenure and Use
> New Commons (also called Nontraditional CPRs)
> Social Organization
> Theory & Experimental
> Urban Commons
> Water Resources
> Wildlife
> (Digital Library of the Commons 2010)

The database contains a huge range of articles and resources, as can be seen from the range of the list above, the contents of which is to a large degree, but not exclusively, focused on the technical methods of management, organisation or production.

Also housed on Indiana University's website is the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC), originally founded in 1984 as the Common Property Network,

becoming the International Association for the Study of Common Property in 1989 and changing its name to its current one in 2006. It began as a non-profit association 'devoted to understanding and improving institutions for the management of resources that are (or could be) held or used collectively by communities in developing or developed countries'. With its final name change it also updated its aims to the following:

> The Association is devoted to bringing together interdisciplinary researchers, practitioners, and policymakers for the purpose of fostering better understandings, improvements, and sustainable solutions for environmental, electronic, and any other type of shared resource that is a commons or a common-pool resource. (IASC 2010 (i))

This Association has produced a quarterly Commons Digest since 1986, originally entitled the Common Property Resource Digest and launched with the following description by Edward Lotterman, the first Digest Editor:

> Organized as an NAS (National Academy of Sciences) panel on Common Property Resources in 1984, the group sought to study CPR systems and their implications for development in the Third World. The group quickly recognized that there was a great deal of existing knowledge, but that this information was not well identified or organized. They also noted that the geographic and disciplinary diversity of existing studies prevented it from being a well-integrated or disseminated 'body of knowledge.' Conscious efforts to overcome this obstacle were clearly called for. (IASC 2010 (i))

The call for papers for the 2011 biannual conference of the IASC is illustrative of the range of areas in which issues of commons are being researched today. The call was for papers addressing theory, policy, practical work, empirical research or describing case studies or any aspect of issues of commons under the following indicative subthemes:

· The Commons, Poverty and Social Exclusion
· Governance of the Commons: Decentralization, Property Rights, Legal Framework, Structure and Organization
· The Commons: Theory, Analytics and Data
· Globalisation, Commercialization and the Commons

· Managing the Global Commons: Climate Change and other Challenges
·Managing Complex Commons (Lagoons, Protected Areas, Wetlands, Mountain Areas, Rangelands, Coastal Commons)
· New Commons (the New Global Commons – Digital Commons, Genetic Commons, Patents, Music, Literature etc) (Ibid)

Another initiative of the IASC is the International Journal of the Commons (IJC), an interdisciplinary peer-reviewed open-access journal that is described as

> ...dedicated to furthering the understanding of institutions for use and management of resources that are (or could be) enjoyed collectively. These resources may be part of the natural world (e.g. forests, climate systems, or the oceans) or they may emerge from social realities created by humans (e.g. the internet or (scientific) knowledge, for example of the sort that is published in open-access journals). (IJC 2010 (i))

The contributors to the database of articles included in the Digital Library are obviously too numerous to attempt any kind of a summary but the involvement of Elinor Ostrom in all the developments described above is a salient feature. Ostrom was Founding President of IASC, and was guest-editor, author, and editorial board member of the IJC. She was also joint winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in Economic Sciences in 2009 'for her analysis of economic governance, especially the commons' (Nobelprize.org), confirming an international recognition of the relevance of this area of research, as the IJC noted in its announcement about the award on its website:

> Lin is a quintessential part of the group of people that is dedicated to guaranteeing the generation and dissemination of cutting-edge knowledge about the commons. The Nobel Committee's choice to celebrate Lin's work, confirms that what the International Journal of the Commons has set out to accomplish - i.e. accommodate the body of knowledge that adds to the understanding and improvement of institutions for the management of resources that are (or could be) held or used collectively - matters! (IJC 2010 (ii))

The relevance and influence of her work were again recently acknowledged by her inclusion in *Time* magazine's list of 100 most influential people of 2012, for her work in highlighting the

need for collective action and managing shared resources that she has 'deeply, persistently and quietly been illuminating for nearly 50 years' (Johnson 2010).

The United Nations and the Commons

James Quilligan, analyst and administrator in the field of international development since 1975, has been promoting commons-based approaches for longer than any other individual that I have been able to identify, with the exception of Elinor Ostrom. Quilligan's work on the commons spans four decades, and includes an ongoing involvement with various initiatives for the United Nations. He was making a case for a 'Common Heritage of Mankind' as early as the 1970s, which idea has returned to the fore in this century in the development of concepts of the global commons, as issues of global governance for environmental matters become critical. In May 2012, Quilligan could also be found giving seminars in London as part of a series of workshops entitled *The Emergence of a Commons-Based Economy,* organised by the 'School of Commoning', a group set up in London in 2010 to promote the education of commons-based approaches in human and social interaction and organisation at the grassroots. He also participated in the 'Making Worlds' event, an Occupy Wall Street Forum on the Commons held in New York on February 2012. This is a part of his work 'to build bottom-up support for political and economic change through the commons' (Quilligan 2011).

Quilligan is both a theorist and a practitioner, who promotes commons-based approaches by applying their practical and philosophical implementation in the development of new economic and political models. Because of this, and also because of the scope of his work which spans forums from the UN to activist camps, he is a very fitting person for inclusion in this study of the commons. His work also highlights the crucial importance of the relationship between the local and the global. While valuing localism and communities, he also points to the danger that 'we concede 'the global' to the Market State' by equating global with bad as some discourse does; the world has indeed seen 'global, pernicious, violent and deadly' forms of production, but 'that does not mean that we human beings across the world are lacking the capacities to define and express our intersubjective and

cooperative relations through our own global sovereignty' (ibid). So local struggles must be reflected in and supported through developments at the global level:

> Just as small resource communities are taking collective action to preserve their resources, I believe that our regional and international communities must also take steps to protect the world's transboundary commons to ensure ecological equilibrium, human survival, personal development and social cohesion. (Ibid)

Within the institutions of international governance, there have been discourses which once were part of a debate that have become sidelined and silenced to such an extent that it is easy for us to overlook the fact that there ever was a debate at all. The Common Heritage of Humanity is one such discourse, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) one of the outcomes of the debate. I will briefly review here UNCLOS – the process rather than the final text – and introduce the concept of the Common Heritage of Mankind, now termed the Common Heritage of Humanity.

Quilligan worked with Willy Brandt, the former German Chancellor, and other world leaders, for the 'Independent Commission on International Development Issues' – more commonly known as the Brandt Commission - a group focused on drawing together proposals to address the vast inequalities between the 'developed' and 'developing' world, which were published in two reports: *North-South* (1980) and *Common Crisis* (1983). The reports focused on comparing the economic power and the wealth of the global north with the poverty of the global south and delivered the message that business could not carry on as usual; the global economy needed to be restructured in favour of developing countries. As well as a general emphasis on international issues such as food, aid and financial reform, it drew attention to problems affecting both developed and developing countries such as the environment and the precariousness of the global economy itself, problems to which all countries would be vulnerable and which should therefore be addressed collectively.

Together with Arvid Pardo, Quilligan developed the Common Heritage of Mankind concept, which has more recently evolved into the Common Heritage of Humanity. This

approach recognised the global commons and sought to formalise agreements concerning their protection, particularly from exploitation by powerful developed nations. Quilligan notes:

> Many people forget (or are unaware of) this now, but the UN at that time was a very vibrant place, full of transformational ideas….We began to negotiate a Law of the Sea Treaty to give all people, and particularly those in poor nations, the right to preserve and/or enjoy the benefits of the international seas and seabeds. We also applied the idea of the commons to outer space, the atmosphere, and the world's transborder forests. (Ibid)

Despite this vision, the impact of the evolving neoliberal agenda under Reagan, Thatcher and Kohl made itself felt more and more strongly, and hindered the influence of the Brandt Reports and of the Common Heritage approach. The commons agenda disappeared from the official platform as a new wave of enclosures took place across the globe, the financial impact of which is assessed by Quilligan:

> During this thirty-year drift in world economic policy and corporate political doctrine, at least $2 trillion in national resources–including public gas, water, and electricity industries, as well as schools, health services, and other utilities–have been sold to private investors across the world. (Quilligan 2002: 40)

These words describe the enclosures so ubiquitous in the neoliberal era that such organisational methodology has come to be taken as a given, as if no alternatives – other than management by the state now almost universally considered to be inevitably inefficient – existed. The quote comes from *The Brandt Equation: 21st Century Blueprint for the New Global Economy*, an update by Quilligan two decades later on progress made since the reports originally compiled by the Brandt Commission in the early 1980s. In general Quilligan reports an absence of progress in most of the measures outlined in the Brandt Reports. 'As documented by the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other agencies, the economic disparities outlined in the Brandt Reports have widened significantly since 1980' (op cit: 1).

Quilligan has continued to work with ideas based on the Common Heritage notion, developing models based on notions of the commons, still seeking to promote them at UN

level, but also at grassroots level. The Common Heritage of Humanity concept sought to make provision in international law – such as UNCLOS – to prevent the appropriation of common heritage spaces by any private or public entity; the aims were to ensure the protection of certain environmental spaces and to protect the interests of human beings independently of the sovereign state (or private corporations). In this notion we find embodied an echo of the notions that are present in Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest and which are explored further in chapter three: a limitation put upon the power of the sovereign (king or state) as a means to protect resources for the benefit of citizens, with now the introduction of the concept of the global good that was not present eight centuries ago.

Similarly to the concepts enshrined in the Charters, those embodied in The Common Heritage notion suffered as a result of changes in the political and economic environment, in both cases being eroded by appropriation – either by the state, or in earlier times by private individuals. As Walljasper notes on the website of On The Commons, referring to the message of another champion of the commons Andrew Kimbrell (lawyer, environmental activist and author): 'environmental destruction and economic inequity is simply the modern version of medieval lords seizing resources that rightfully belonged to everyone' (Walljasper 2011). In UNCLOS, the opposing notion of an Exclusive Economic Zone, which gives states special rights over the exploration and use of marine resources for two hundred nautical miles around their borders, was included and has advanced, to the point where the idea of a commons became almost entirely eroded. However, as thinkers such as Quilligan foresaw – and as he noted in The Brandt Equation - the neoliberal model would lead to financial, environmental and social crisis. At the present time, it seems pragmatic to believe that the time for a revival of the notion of the commons has indeed come, as Time magazine's recognition of the importance of Ostrom's work indicates is occurring.

As Peter Barnes notes at the top of the bibliography of his book 'Capitalism 3: A Guide to Reclaiming the Commons': 'The number of books that have been written about capitalism, the commons, and economic theory, is staggering' (Barnes 2006: 179). Conferences on themes around commons now appear regularly, e.g. IASC's '1st Thematic Conference on the knowledge commons'. The conference theme states that it 'seeks to address in an integrated

way the problems of knowledge sharing, by initiating a systematic comparative analysis of the broad range of existing experiences with commons based modes of production of knowledge' (International Journal of the Commons (iii)).   Also the first International Commons Conference, co-organized by the Commons Strategies Group, took place in Berlin in November 2010 (International Commons Conference 2010), followed by a second such event in 2013.

It is not possible to ascribe the emergence of the commons discourse to any single source or influence. Though many allude to a growing commons paradigm in their works (e.g. Bollier, De Angelis and Wainwright), none of them reference this. Bollier describes the growing use of the concept of the commons as a movement, with an embryonic vision, its participants – from whatever walk of life and in a range of activities - as 'commoners'; all of which represents a 'new grand narrative'. He concludes that: 'What's needed is a surge of new leadership and resources to take the commons to its next, more interesting stage of development' (Bollier 2007 (i):8).

What can be attempted is an analysis of the emergence of this discourse, its effect and its potential for the future that recognises the influence of a wide range of actors, and the activists and texts that are discussed in this thesis reflect this diversity of the commons discourse. If leadership and resources are indeed to help usher in a more socially just and environmentally sustainable society that Bollier describes as the vision of the commons, it is in their work that the roots of any commons-based future will lie. Hawken has talked about the groundswell of tiny, community-based environmental groups whose concerns are their local river or woodland. Klein has written about social activism in American cities – groups such as Adbusters – as well as, along with many others, the anti-globalisation movement. Shiva has focused on the struggle of farmers in India over access to land and seed. Wainwright has studied different communities in the UK struggling against disempowerment and drawn parallels with the case of Porto Alegre, highlighting a new kind of international solidarity that is political but not party-based. Ostrom has developed an entire field of study in common pool resource management, challenging Hardin's famous and widely accepted 'tragedy of the commons' argument (Hardin 1968) by showing that many examples of common pool resource management around the world are successful. The Ecologist and

Federici have described the international politics of enclosure brought about by capitalism in its colonial as well as its neoliberal stages. By bringing together these and many other examples, some included in the literature review in the next chapter of this study, we can begin to identify a shared set of values that are described in the language of the commons, and identified in the behaviour of activists and practitioners.

An important question to ask is whether the development of interest in the commons – as a concept, as an ideal, and as a practical approach to resource management – is translating or can translate into anything with sufficient impact to contribute in bringing the sort of shift needed, described by Wainwright:

> The kind of policies we need – an expansion of public services, turning the banks into public utilities and a radical green conversion programme – require a radical shift in the balance of social and economic power towards working people, constraining capitalist elites and requiring governments to respond to the needs of the majority. (Wainwright 2009)

The odds against seem high. In the London Review of Books (July 2011 edition), John Lanchester describes the lack of economic choices faced by the average citizen, most of whom must seize the job that they are qualified to do and lucky enough to get, and leave the macro-economic organisation to others (Lanchester 2011). He is writing particularly about the Greek crisis, but his comments are also about other European countries in crisis such as Iceland, Ireland and the UK: 'a sense of alienation and incomprehension and done-unto-ness. People feel they have very little economic or political agency, very little control over their own lives' (op cit 2011:6). In their various responses to the current economic crisis, governments often imply that everyone enjoyed the good times so now everyone must muck-in and tighten their belts; electorates must share the responsibility and 'accept the blame for the state they are in. But the general public, it turns out, had very little understanding of the economic mechanisms which were, without their knowing it, ruling their lives' (ibid). Could a Greek civil servant really be expected to 'turn down the job offer, in the absence of alternative employment, because it was somehow bad for Greece to have so

many public sector workers earning an OK living? Where is the agency in that person's life, the meaningful space for political-economic action?' (ibid).

Economic inequalities are growing (despite the much-hailed growth in the middle classes in emerging capitalist countries, which in many cases hides growing disparity between those at the top and bottom of the spectrum). The proliferation of the large-scale producers and growers and farmers of everything, with their tendency to make it hard or impossible for small producers to stay in business, marches on unabated. Agro-business typifies this trend, making business for small farmers harder and harder all over the world. While exploring the discourse of the commons, we must bear in mind the importance of economic power and explore whether commons discourse generates practice and policy that can help shift this balance. The economic models proposed by writers such as Barnes, involving new types of markets, certainly map out routes to more balanced and equitable systems, while models such as peer to peer production, and the creative commons approaches within the online community, provide concrete examples of some of the alternatives to traditional hierarchical organisational forms.

Meanwhile, in 2011, the streets of Greece, UK, Spain, and Egypt erupted in protest. People objected to the price of food, cuts to health services and education, condemned government corruption and demanded political voice. The protests that took place in many countries across the globe that year and the following can perhaps be described as one element of an unprecedented eruption of the 'alarmed reactions' noted by Hess:

> The rise of new commons signals alarmed reactions to increasing commodification, privatization, and corporatization, untamed globalization, and unresponsive governments. The new commons "movement" is charged with electrical currents beckoning citizens of the world to develop new forms of self-governance, collaboration, and collective action. (Hess 2008:3)

This chapter has described the main areas of research and usage of ideas about the commons, from the management of material resources to the protecting of access to immaterial commons such as knowledge and culture. We have seen that notions of the commons are used in many different contexts such as in the practical, applied aspects of

Ostrom's work to the social and cultural meanings given in Linebaugh's historical analysis. We have begun to discover the role of grassroots activists, such as those referred to in this chapter (see p.26) by Wainwright (2003, 2010) Klein (2001) and Hess (2008, above). It is to these citizens and this new commons 'movement' that this thesis will turn, after the literature review in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Writing about the Commons: A Literature Review

There are active movements of human commoning and worldwide demands to share wealth and safeguard common resources on every continent, from movements of urban gardening to transcontinental oil swaps, efforts of actual autonomous communism. (Linebaugh 2008:280)

In the previous chapter, ideas about how the commons have gained ground and taken hold in recent decades were explored, and evidence of this was given through a wide range of different examples. In this chapter, the particular angles of this re-emergence of the commons that relate to the research question of this thesis will be explored in more depth, through a literature review. We begin by exploring the presence of the commons debate in two contexts: socio-economic history and the environment. The contemporary discourse of the commons permits us to articulate the interconnection of these two in new and important ways, which are highly relevant for addressing the current critical issues of climate change and other environmental concerns that are interlinked with our models of economic development. It encompasses socio-economic with environmental concerns, at a time when there is global experience of crises in both these areas, and little evidence of success on the part of governments to find solutions. Where the environmental movement has experienced a deep rift between pro- and anti-capitalist paths, the commons movement, it will be argued, provides a way to move forward from this dichotomy.

This chapter will ask whether there is a case to describe commons as being either pro- or anti-capitalist. This is explored through some of the key arguments of proponents of the commons - both writers and activists - and anti-capitalist commentators. Reflecting also on some of the work of activists in the commons context, the case will be made that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that out of the commons discourse, we can begin to argue for a theory of the commons that transcends the pro-/anti-capitalist dichotomy and presents us with post-capitalist futures.

The value of taking an interdisciplinary approach to the topic of the commons was raised in chapter one. This perspective is partly influenced by the appearance of a commons

theme in many different academic areas that are brought together in this analysis. It is also because the commons provide a focal point that allows us to think in an interconnected way about critical social, economic, environmental, political and cultural concerns. The commons have infiltrated many different academic areas, which invites us to evaluate the relevance of taking interdisciplinary approaches to tackling some of the entrenched dilemmas of the 21st century. Above I noted that the commons draw together economic and environmental concerns. Commentating on the achievements of Elinor Ostrom, Wall suggests that by marrying these concerns she developed a 'new science for a new world' (Wall 2014:176). Though approaching from a different perspective, Gilbert had this very much in mind when he edited the 69th edition of the journal *New Formations:* 'it is only through a radical interdisciplinarity which can accommodate insights from geography, economics, cultural studies, anthropology, philosophy and the natural sciences that the questions our current predicaments pose can be properly addressed' (Gilbert 2010:7). These predicaments are the 'ecological questions' which 'frame all of the most urgent political debates of our epoch' (ibid).

The need to step outside the confines of academic disciplines and inherited language in order to find and recount new stories is given a place to land through the commons. Esteva and Prakash write of having to unlearn, of a period of deafness and blindness as they have to let go of previously learnt concepts and language in order to become able to see and interpret the world in a new way (Esteva & Prakash 1998). The authors describe their work as an expression of – or an exploration of – what they term an 'epistemological rupture' rather than an intention to establish a new school of post-modern thought: 'we hope to identify and give a name to a wide collection of culturally diverse initiatives and struggles of the so-called illiterate and uneducated non-modern "masses", pioneering radical post-modern paths out of the morass of modern life' (op cit: 11).

We can see that responses to global environmental crises are bringing about new forms of collaboration and cooperation and new discourses and actions. This is reflected in the work of grassroots activists, as we shall discuss in the next chapters. There are also examples manifesting themselves in the work of governments and scientists as they collaborate in such international ventures as CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear

Research) and the international space station, and find ways forward in agreeing over access to areas of high seas around the Arctic. To deal with energy, space, and resources - among the most fundamental issues of our time – knowledge is shared between nations at an international level; this can be taken as another example of the new commons emerging. So also it needs to be within academia; as Gilbert noted, and also Esteva and Prakash (1998).

Looking to the future, however, there is also evidence that struggles over dwindling resources bring about ever increasing levels of violent conflict, and that the forces of capitalism will work ever harder through times of crisis. As Dawson foresees: 'As in previous crises of over-accumulation, it is likely that a savage new round of enclosures will be unleashed in order to secure accelerated rates of profit' (Dawson2010: 22). He also notes that 'the dominant trend remains toward privatisation of the last and greatest of the Earth's commons: the atmosphere' (ibid). This refers to the commoditisation of the atmosphere through such steps as carbon emissions trading, one of several similar strategies to combat climate change popular at elite levels. Dawson also outlines the movements to 'reclaim the commons' that have emerged in resistance to these processes. He rightly reminds us that this resistance has taken form in 'a wave of religious and ethnic fundamentalist movements' (op cit: 16), as well as 'social movements dedicated to tearing down the fences established by the neoliberal order and reclaiming the commons in an egalitarian manner' (ibid). Focusing his article on the latter, he expresses one of the arguments of this thesis when he notes that 'these movements articulated new oppositional cultural and political form' (Dawson op cit: 22).

Histories of Enclosure and the Commons

The story of the Diggers (the name given to groups of political dissenters in England in the years 1649 and 1650, who organised together to make a number of land occupations in order to reclaim and communally farm underused land) has been retold through a conceptual art project entitled *Digger Barley* by Matthew Fuller (Fuller 2008 (i)). The project includes some text and a small packet of seeds of wild barley collected from the first of the

Digger sites at St. Georges Hill in Surrey, which is now a private golf course and guarded luxury housing estate. The Diggers were a movement of direction action – of land occupations – that is commemorated by Fuller in this project. He gives an account of an attempt to 'reclaim' common land, and to farm underused land communally in order to grow subsistence food; of the near-invisibility of the Diggers in history; and of the evolution of once common land to private property for sports recreation and a gated community. 'During 2007, several visits were made to these grounds and a harvest made of wild barley. The effects of this movement exist in ideas and in actions, but also in populations of plants whose seeds continue to spread. Digger Barley is a distribution of these seeds' (ibid).

As Fuller notes: '… rights to the commons were always specific. What the Diggers proposed was to maximise the use of the commons' (ibid). They attempted to develop the rights of access to the commons – which traditionally had permitted certain rights such as collecting firewood and allowing animals to graze – to a more general, open right for people to manage and farm – 'a common treasury to all the people' (ibid).

The essence of the story that thesis explores is contained in this piece of work, in the words of the text and as Fuller points out, in the seeds of wild barley. I asked Matthew if he could send me a few copies of this work, which he did, and which I have handed out at research conferences at which I presented a paper about grassroots activism and the commons. This distribution of Fuller's art project to my audience introduced activism into the room in way that my words alone could not: my own activism and that of Matthew and of the Diggers in bygone centuries. It is this contemporary re-emergence of what Linebaugh identifies as the 'suppressed praxis of the commons' (Linebaugh 2008:19) – here symbolically represented by the seeds of wild barley - that is the focus of this study, and that this study is also a part of. Fuller's project again highlights the two important roots of the current commons revival: socio-economic history; and the environment.

The global story of enclosure is not limited to the contemporary acts of corporate giants such as Coca-Cola, or those of the factory owners of the industrial revolution, but is defined by many commentators as a process initiated by dominant minorities throughout history. The commons discourse has been used to articulate a post-modern critique of

development theory (The Ecologist 1993; Esteva & Prakash 1998), as well as feminist accounts of colonialism and the global economy (e.g. Mies & Shiva 1993; Federici 2004).

Gustavo Esteva told a group of people attending a course at Schumacher College in Devon entitled *Development: What Next?* about his own journey, from starting his working life in business with all the advantages of an elite background, to prominence in the NGO sector where he worked closely with government on the nation's development agenda, to revolutionary, to non-violent resistance, advisor to the Zapatistas, 'deprofessionalized intellectual', founder of the Universidad de la Tierra in the Mexican city of Oaxaca, and resident of Chiapas. It was, he told us, through remembering the stories told by his grandmother, whose entry to his childhood family house had always been through the side door because she was an indigenous Mexican that he began to make his mental shift away from the development sector and its agenda.

Capitalist expansion has been able to take place throughout the centuries as a result of enclosure. 'Processes that now go under the rubric of "nation-building", "economic growth" and "progress" are first and foremost processes of expropriation, exclusion, denial and dispossession. In a word, of enclosure' (The Ecologist 1993: 22). Part of the myth that capitalism evoked was that of the 'modern', and that by definition those 'unmodern' were backward if not barbaric, waiting for the gifts that economic development would bring to their communities (Harvey 2005). Esteva has much commented on the relationship between Mexicans and the development project (Esteva and Prakash 1998; Esteva 2011), noting that Mexico became a so-called underdeveloped country overnight, with the beginning of NAFTA (North America Free Trade Area) on 1st January 1994. 'In 1992 they (the Mexican government) opened to the private market the land which had been in the hands of peasants since the 1910 revolution. The North American Free Trade Agreement, which came into force in 1994, consolidated this anti-peasant orientation in the name of free market' (Esteva 2011). The Zapatistas symbolically timed their uprising to coincide with this event, as a way of to articulating their refusal of this agreement.

Federici explores the connection between colonialist expansion and the internationalisation of the slave trade and the witch-hunts, drawing particular attention to the plight of the women: 'The modern nation state has been built only by stripping power

and control from commons regimes and creating structures of governance from which the great mass of humanity (particularly women) are excluded' (Federici 2004:21). Resistance to this process, seen in modern day examples such as that of the Zapatistas, and in the 17th century Levellers and Diggers movements, also took place in the medieval world in which capitalism was to take root. Federici describes these in a study of the emergence of capitalism which starts with an exploration of the social struggles that shook the feudal world. 'Capitalism was the counter-revolution that destroyed the possibilities that had emerged from the anti-feudal struggle...This much must be stressed, for the belief that capitalism "evolved" from feudalism and represents a higher form of social life has not yet been dispelled' (Federici 2004: 21). These anti-feudal struggles brought a 'rich cargo of demands, social and political aspirations, and antagonistic practices...' (ibid) and 'called for an egalitarian social order based upon the sharing of wealth and the refusal of hierarchies and authoritarian rule' (op cit: 22). Other than wishing to 'rethink the development of capitalism from a feminist point of view', Federici is motivated by what she describes as 'the worldwide return, with the new global expansion of capitalist relations, of a set of phenomena usually associated with the genesis of capitalism. Among them are a new round of "enclosures"...' (op cit: 11). At the heart of the anti-feudal struggles lay the importance of the commons, that resonates again today in visions that reclaim economies and cultures from the grip of capitalist realities.

Women played key roles in the millenarian and heretic movements that emerged in the 12th and 13th centuries, but movements included women and men, and also both peasants and urban workers. Among the most influential were the Cathars, whom Federici notes as having an 'international dimension...Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the heretic movement was the first "proletarian international" – such was the reach of the sects and the links they established among themselves' (ibid). Making the link between these struggles and contemporary movements, Federici writes in a more recent article on the commons: 'From Peter Linebaugh's work, especially *The Magna Carta Manifesto* (2008), we have learned that the commons have been the thread that has connected the history of the class struggle into our time, and indeed the fight for the commons is all around us' (Federici 2011). Federici also notes the relevance of the contemporary phenomena of urban

gardening. In the growth of urban gardening – which is mostly food growing - we witness a combined response to the concerns of economic and environmental sustainability at the grassroots, as will be further explored in chapters five and six. Drawing attention to the significance of their spread in the US through the 1980s and 1990s, she describes how urban gardens have opened the way to a ''rurbanization' process that is indispensable if we are to regain control over our food production, regenerate our environment and provide for our subsistence' (ibid). This articulates the concerns of the contemporary wave of struggle and activism that is the particular concern of this essay. She also refers us to Chris Carlsson's text *Nowtopia* (2008) for a description of 'the many invisible, communing activities and communities that people are creating in North America' that are part of discovering 'how commons can become the foundation of a non-capitalist economy' (ibid).

In Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest the protection of the commons and human rights are documented for the first time. The fact that these historic documents address both these concerns has become once more relevant in our current epoch, with the linking of ecological with socio-economic issues. Linebaugh evaluates the significance of Magna Carta as a source of protection against tyranny, and describes how its companion, the Charter of the Forest, enshrined and protected the subsistence rights of the poor partly through protecting their right of access to the commons. The history of rural Britain can be described as a gradual process of enclosure – or privatisation – of common land, which is land that had been collectively owned or managed, or to which access has been protected. A debate has raged for five hundred years between those for and against enclosure. This history is ongoing, and has indeed resurfaced with new meaning, as protest against the neoliberal economic model finds voice through the story of the commons.

Linebaugh's central thesis is that the restoration of political rights can only be achieved and sustained by the recovery of economic and social rights; 'in the two charters political rights in restricting autocratic behaviour paralleled common rights in restoring subsistence usufructs (goods or usages required for well-being)' (Linebaugh 2008:8). Linebaugh draws attention to the importance of these charters at the time of their signing and in the contemporary world, and additionally traces their presence through US and British history from their creation to the present day. By exploring a wide range of sources from

across the centuries in the UK and the US, Linebaugh describes the contested history of the Charters, showing how the principles laid down in these historic documents – for example, the notion of Habeas Corpus – have at different times been lost and reinstated, and how the idea of the commons has been used by men and women in the hope of building a better world. He illustrates the link between habeas corpus and the commons through the events that followed 9/11: the 'assault' that followed saw:

> ...the imposition of neoliberalism – free trade, unrestricted profiteering, and the infamous Order no.39 privatizing the public enterprises of Iraq. Parallel to this infamy were the losses of liberties derived from Magna Carta's forgotten chapter 39: habeas corpus has suffered particularly, trial by jury has suffered attack, the prohibition against torture wilts, due process of law is lost in Guantanamo. (Op cit: 11)

He goes on to note that '...historians have been derelict, ignoring Magna Carta and thus laying the groundwork of forgetting. As for the commoning provisions in the Charters of Liberties, they have been ignored as out-of-date feudal relics. The argument of this book says their time has come' (ibid).

The commons discourse emerges in a range of discourses, academic disciplines, and events. An exploration of the commons – or more precisely, common pool resources – was brought into political economy through the work of Elinor Ostrom. It also has its roots in the environmental movement – both in the activist movement that first struggled to raise awareness of environmental issues, and in mainstream policy making and governance relating to environmental issues. Of the seven activists interviewed as part of this research (see chapter 6), environmental issues were central for four of them. Not only the concerns, but also some of the ways of functioning such as the practise of bottom-up decision making among activists, have notably been passed on from the environmental movement.

The authors of *Whose Common Future? Reclaiming the Commons* (The Ecologist 1993) pulled particular issues together in a way that seems to have helped to establish the discourse that characterises much of the work that followed it. The work references much previous work done on traditional commons, including that of Ostrom and others on Common Pool Resources and commons regimes, for example. However, this text is the first

to make explicit a wider discourse about commons and enclosures, and to name local resistance to capitalist exploitation and neo-colonial development agendas as attempts to 'reclaim the commons'.

In the preface, the authors state that the book 'arose out of the work of many', including 'numerous others from many different organizations, South and North, contributing passages, comments, critiques, information and views', while the final text was the direct responsibility of: Simon Farlie, Nicholas Hildyard, Larry Lohmann and Sarah Sexton (The Ecologist 1993: vii). Such a communal approach to the production of a text is rare, and testifies to the ambitions of the authors; the work itself, then, is an example of a creative commons, or a peer production. The four authors also presented a paper at the 1995 annual conference of the Political Studies Association, entitled *Reclaiming the Commons*. The inclusion of this paper at a PSA conference supports the view that this area of research has important contributions to make to the development of the political studies discipline, a view endorsed in a publication by the PSA in 2010, as referred to in chapter one. The paper is available (at time of writing) on the website of The Corner House, an organisation currently staffed by three of the four authors, established in 1997, which 'aims to support democratic and community movements for environmental and social justice' (The Corner House 2011). The fourth author, Fairlie, continues to write and work on the commons. He is co-editor of *The Land*, a magazine that is 'written by and for people who believe that the roots of justice, freedom, social security and democracy lie not so much in access to money, or to the ballot box, as in access to land and its resources'; the editorial policy is to 'campaign peacefully for access to land, its resources and the decision-making processes affecting them, for everyone, irrespective of race, creed, age or gender'(The Land 2011).

The authors use the Rio 1992 'Earth Summit' – the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) – to launch their story. The reference made to it comes in the form of a fierce critique of the conference that includes the following point about the gap between its rhetoric and its real agenda:

> ...if, as Maurice Strong, Secretary General of UNCED, claimed, there was a "groundswell of support from the grassroots for the objectives of the

Earth Summit", why were the issues which have been central to the work of the grassroots groups – in particular the right of local communities to determine their own future – excluded from the agenda? (The Ecologist 1993: vi)

The opening message of the book is that the conference served to allow business as usual to continue while ignoring the voices and needs of people at the grassroots: it reinforced the power of the corporate sector by confirming it to be 'the key actor in the "battle to save the planet"' (op cit: 1), with the effect of creating an environmental (or 'sustainable development') policy that 'would appear to cloak an agenda that is just as destructive, just an undermining of peoples' rights and livelihoods as the development agenda of old' (op cit: vi).

This critique is perhaps too dismissive of the benefits that the growth of the sustainable development agenda brought in. While it was certainly a compromise and permitted the continuation of traditional economic development, it also initiated environmental impact assessments, and gender and local assessments in development projects by the World Bank. It is worth remembering, as was explored in chapter two, that 'the UN at that time was a very vibrant place, full of transformational ideas' (Quilligan 2011). Ideas such as the Common Heritage of Mankind that were discussed at UN level in the late 1960s and early 1970s, would now be assumed to be too radical for this forum. Sustainable Development was a dilution of some of the radical ideas that were entering the UN at that time.

The right of local communities to determine their own future is a key theme that runs through much discussion about the commons, and is one that is taken up in this study: this is a discussion about power, about the power relationship between states and their citizens, and about struggles for democracy and autonomy; the essence of politics. The authors describe grassroots groups as being involved in a struggle 'to reinstate their communities as sources of social and political authority. *Whose Common Future?* is an attempt to describe the background to that struggle' (op cit:2). This description of the establishment of a global economy through a gradual process of enclosure of commons, that transferred an ever-increasing amount of power and resources away from localities and to

transnational corporations, the effects of this growing network of power on people's lives beyond simply the economic, and the devastating effects for the environment, make this book a landmark text in the development of a discourse around the commons, whose ideas are still relevant and still being built on today in the search for new politics.

Again challenging mainstream notions of 'development' the authors describe the disorder of the city as originating from the modern buildings and infrastructures, while surviving amidst these are the slums and the street vendors' turf, described as a 'commons' which provides:

> ...the order which can safeguard the interests of ordinary Bangkokians and their environment...When subsistence is at stake, they often improvise or reconstruct rough-and-ready new commons regimes rather than pin their hopes on either the market economy or public institutions. For better or worse, the commons is the social and political space where things get done and where people derive a sense of belonging and have an element of control over their lives. (Op cit: 6)

The tradition of the commons in Thailand is described as originating in the countryside where 'until recently, the category of "the public" barely existed. In day-to-day practise, it was above all community which exercised dominion over time, space, agriculture and language' (op cit: 5).

Capitalism and the commons

A debate that runs through much of the contemporary literature on the topic of the commons is whether the commons should be seen as pro- or anti-capitalist. Both sides of this debate will be considered in this chapter. In light of the research question of this thesis (how is the emerging discourse of the common contributing to new politics) this is an important consideration, as we would expect the 'new politics' to look very different according to how this question is answered. How does the development of a commons-focused paradigm affect capitalism – does it reform it or does it replace it? The conclusion I will reach is that this question is the wrong one to be asking.

What is meant by asking whether commons are pro-capitalist or anti-capitalist? I will address this question through an exploration of the case put forward by those who argue that the commons are in danger of being hijacked by capitalist forces and being made to serve as the saviour of capitalism (Caffentzis 2004, 2010, De Angelis 2009, Federici 2004, 2009).

The question about the relationship between the commons and capitalism clearly demands investigation. It is critical to the future debate about the commons that we understand the role that the commons can play in reforming capitalism, *and/or* in helping to develop post-capitalist models. If an understanding and articulation of the commons in social and economic models can play a role in forging sustainable futures, at a time when capitalism has reached a crisis that is taken by many to be evidence of its failure, yet with viable alternatives not in evidence and the Left with little to offer in terms of a significant challenge to the status quo, then realizing their potential – revolutionary or otherwise – is a task that is long overdue. The conclusion I reach lies in the *and/or* phrase above. I will argue that the commons lie beyond a pro-/anti- capitalist dichotomy. As discussed in chapter one, the commons provide a new language that we can use to move towards a post-capitalist future.

To enter into this debate, we will return to the work of Elinor Ostrom, and the critique of her work by Caffentzis, De Angelis and Federici, who see Ostrom as a figurehead for those who would hijack the revolutionary potential of the commons for the ongoing capitalist exploitation of the commons. As discussed in chapter two, Ostrom is one of the most celebrated pioneers of work around the commons. Her work was recognised by the award of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2009 for her analysis of economic governance, which included the commons, and she was included in Time magazine's list of most influential people 2012. She is recognised by Caffentzis as 'the major theorist of the capitalist use of the commons' (2010:30), and by Federici as 'the leading voice in this field' (2011); her influence has been recognised by her critics as well as by those who value her work (e.g. Wall 2014(ii)).

Federici includes Ostrom's award of the Nobel Prize in a list of indicators that 'a re-valorization of the commons has become trendy among mainstream economists and capitalist planners' (2011). The 'adaption of the idea of the commons to market interests' is evident in 'the language of the commons (that) has been appropriated by the World Bank

and the United Nations', while we also 'witness the growing academic literature on the subject and its cognates: social capital, gift economies, altruism' (ibid). She notes that even The Economist 'cautiously joined the chorus' in an article in its July 21, 2008 issue (ibid). Like Caffentzis, she argues that the commons is being used to save capitalism from itself, for capitalist planners 'have also recognised that, carried to the extreme, the commodification of social relations has self-defeating consequences' (ibid). They have recognised that the commons continue to provide capitalist accumulation with a source for 'the free appropriation of immense quantities of labour and resources that must appear as externalities of the market' (ibid).

It may be harder, however, to categorise Ostrom as pro-capitalist than these commentators suggest. While these anti-capitalist writers consider Ostrom to be a leading voice for those who adapt the idea of the commons to further market interests, and that in this element of the current revival of interest in the commons lies a dangerous takeover of the revolutionary potential of the commons by pro-capitalist reformers, Derek Wall, on the other hand, holds Ostrom's work in high regard despite confirming himself as an anti-capitalist (Wall 2014(i)) (and which position he puts into practice through political activism in the left wing of the Green Party). Wall describes the potential of the commons to provide alternatives to both market and state forces, and offers useful insights into the complex nature of Ostrom's position, arguing that to reject it as neoliberal is a mistake and does not do her justice.

Wall wrote an article in the Morning Star celebrating her award of the Nobel Prize (Wall 2009). (This article provides one of the best introductions to notions of the commons that I have come across, written in clear, every day language. It is successful at communicating specialist arguments to a non-specialist audience and avoids the use of jargon and academic clichés which, as discussed in chapter one, is not always the case). Wall provides us with a short overview of Ostrom's work and some examples of its influence on policy, relating Ostrom's outputs to those of Marx, Chavez and Castro, noting: 'Many socialists will find her scepticism about the state unpalatable. They should not…. visionary political leaders such as Hugo Chavez and Raul Castro have been putting her ideas of a grassroots, diverse and ecological commons into action' (Wall 2009). This is the only piece of

writing that I have come across in which Ostrom receives praise from the anti-capitalist camp. Wall acknowledges the unorthodoxy of his position and defends it. After some references to Marx's writing on the commons and on ecology, he concludes by noting that 'perhaps Ostrom is a little more radical than Marx for her time frame', which claim he illustrates by quoting her words in response to being awarded a political prize in the previous year:

> I am deeply indebted to the indigenous peoples in the US who had an image of seven generations being the appropriate time to think about the future. I think we should all reinstate in our mind the seven-generation rule. When we make really major decisions, we should ask not only what will it do for me today, but what will it do for my children, my children's children and their children's children into the future. (Ibid)

Ostrom dedicated a lifetime of work to exploring the implementation of various techniques for approaching common-pool resource problems, seeking to contribute to the development of helpful policies by identifying the characteristics of successful cases. In her seminal book 'Governing the Commons' (Ostrom 1990), Ostrom addresses Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' argument, a discourse which became established as a corner-stone of the common property debate after the publication of his article by that name in Science magazine (Hardin 1968). The term 'commons' became associated for many people with the phrase 'the tragedy of', as the result of this article, which enjoyed great influence for a number of years. The situation described in this article, and commonly understood by the term 'the tragedy of the commons' ever since, is one in which the self-interest of individuals sharing a common resource leads inevitably to the depletion of that resource. The idea was not a new one, and had been discussed by agrarian reformers in Britain since the 18th century and used as a justification of the enclosure movement. It should be noted that Hardin himself was particularly concerned with the effects of overpopulation. Commenting on the influence of Hardin's article on an earlier discourse about the commons, Ostrom notes that 'the expression "the tragedy of the commons" has come to symbolize the degradation of the environment to be expected whenever many individuals use a scarce resource in common' (Ostrom 1990:2).

Ostrom illustrates both successful and unsuccessful examples of efforts to escape the

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tragic outcomes Hardin described an inevitable, drawing lessons from the experiences of various individuals in specific settings in order to 'help stimulate the development and use of a better theory of collective action' (op cit: 14). Reflecting on the policy prescriptions for managing environmental resources, she outlines the two options, which are different ways of providing the 'external Leviathan' deemed to be necessary for the successful management of such scenarios: central government control; or the imposition of private property rights, though as she notes, how private property rights can be organised in regard to resources such as water of fisheries is unclear. We can here begin to see how Ostrom's analysis mirrors the concerns of development policies more broadly; as she remarks, 'in countries where small villages had owned and regulated their local communal forests for generations, nationalization meant expropriation' (op cit: 23). This manner of expropriation through either nationalization or privatisation continues apace today – though the latter to corporations rather than individuals, and the nationalization is often taken as a first step towards a sell-off. Here we see Ostrom's argument supporting the wider concerns outlined in chapter one about the panacea of neoliberalism being applied universally with full faith in the market as a model that can be imposed in any scenarios to achieve growth. However, Ostrom rightly draws our attention to the absence of a clear division between private and public - or between market and state – arguing that 'many successful CPR (common pool resource) institutions are rich mixtures of "private-like" and "public-like" institutions defying classification in a sterile dichotomy' (op cit:14). In this, she echoes the approaches of key commons protagonists (Barnes 2006, Bauwens 2011(ii), Bollier 2003, Carlsson 2008) who argue that the commons emerge as a new force through the capitalist market place, rather than developing as an alternative model outside of or independent of the market.

Others have been more critical of Hardin's thesis, seeing it as a piece of neoliberal propaganda. In this range of responses to Hardin's article, we can see the political span across which the concept of the commons is discussed. Issue 7 (Summer 2009) of The Land devoted a major section to the history of enclosure ('Dismantling the Commons - History of Enclosure in Britain'). In this, Simon Fairlie offers a short history of the progressive enclosure of commons that 'has deprived most of the British people of access to agricultural land; and shows that the historical process bears little relationship to the "Tragedy of the Commons",

the theory which ideologues in the neoliberal era adopted as part of a smear campaign against common property institutions' (Fairlie 2009:16). Fairlie also notes:

> Faced with a barrage of...evidence about both historical and existing commons, Hardin in the early 1990s, retracted his original thesis, conceding: "The title of my 1968 paper should have been 'The Tragedy of the Unmanaged Commons'...Clearly the background of the resources discussed by Lloyd (and later by myself) was one of non-management of the commons under conditions of scarcity." (Op Cit p.18)

The concept of 'scarcity' is an important one, and some contemporary commons theories point to the way in which capitalist systems require (and therefore create) scarcity in order to function (e.g. Bauwens 2011(i)). The capitalist 'value' of goods is partly derived from that scarcity. Yet some new systems of production debunk this, such as production via open and free input. Examples of such commons-based organisations are explored in later chapters.

There is much material referred to throughout this thesis that illustrates that the notion of the commons is being used in both anti-capitalist and pro-capitalist discourses. A huge amount of work has been done, for example by Ostrom and others in researching management models for such common pool resources as fisheries and foresting. While this work aims to establish models which are both non-exploitative for the people whose livelihoods are involved, and also sustainable for the natural environment, they seek to operate within the existing framework of a capitalist market place. The overthrow of capitalism is not an objective; reformative approaches seek to introduce equitable and sustainable arrangements into the capitalist market place in such projects. Much work has been done that explores more broadly the possibility of introducing models which will reform capitalism – in order to provide greater environmental and social justice - through the introduction of the commons to counterbalance the power of the market-state. These examples of commons-related discourse and actions do not form part of an 'anti-capitalist resistance'. Federici refers to the 'appropriation' of the language of the commons by the World Bank and the United Nations and that it is thus 'put at the service of privatization' (Federici 2011). Quilligan, on the other hand, as explored in the previous chapter, describes

the development of thinking around notions of the commons at the United Nations as important and at one time quite radical. Caffentzis explores this contended territory in detail, as will be introduced now and discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

The appearance of notions of the commons in both radical and reformative approaches to capitalism has been introduced, as has some criticism by one commentator from the anti-capitalist camp of the use of the notion of commons in a reformist approach to capitalism as a 'neoliberal takeover' and a 'distortion' of the concept of the commons (De Angelis 2009). This apparent dichotomy needs examining in more detail. Caffentzis sets out to clarify the distinction between the two perspectives, noting that anti-capitalists have often overlooked the use of the commons in capitalist perspectives: 'Given this semantic and political conflict (and its 'fog'), it is time to sharpen up our thinking and action and ask after the future of the commons' (Caffentzis 2010:25). He had previously written a longer paper on the same subject entitled: 'A Tale of Two Conferences: Globalization, the Crisis of Neoliberalism and Question of the Commons'. This paper was prepared for the Alter-Globalization Conference August 9, 2004 San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. I will return to this paper in chapter seven as part of a more thorough exploration of the apparent capitalist/anti-capitalist dichotomy.

The title of Caffentzis' 2010 article suggests his view that the two streams of thinking contain 'conflicting (but confused) conceptions of the commons' and that, as he concludes:

> Most important for anti-capitalists is the future of the commons, or in other words, whether 'the commons' will be ceded to those who want to enclose it semantically and use it to further neoliberal capitalism's ends or whether we will continue to infuse in 'the commons' our struggle for another form of social life beyond the coordination of capital? (Caffentzis 2010:41)

It opens with a recognition that the revival of the capitalist and the anti-capitalist perspectives of the commons developed side by side in the 1980s and 1990s, with Elinor Ostrom the main theorist on the capitalist perspective. After what he refers to as a ferocious two decades of neoliberal expansion and new enclosures experienced through the 1970s and 1980s, supported by the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) in Africa in particular, this approach began to soften in the early nineties when 'resistance led to a

revaluation of the commons by the arbiters of establishment wisdom, spearheaded by the World Bank and academic students of the commons'. Caffentzis refers to the 1992 World Development Report, 'where the authors defended to a limited extent the African commons'. Hence was launched what he calls "Neoliberalism's 'Plan B'" which he defines as 'a political position to evade the antagonistic responses to the privatisation of land when they became too powerful and aggressive' (op cit: 28). Caffentzis also argues that thus capitalism is saved from being led by neoliberalism, 'capitalism's own worst enemy', to what he calls its 'Midas Limit' - where individualism goes wild and crises arise periodically due to loss of trust in the market as in the sub-prime mortgage crisis of 2007 (op cit: 31).

An important contribution that both of Caffentzis' papers make is their reference to the pre-existing, pre-capitalist commons still in existence and upon which the subsistence of billions of people still depend; 'indeed the forms of social cooperation implicit in these commons make it possible for all those 'living' on $1 a day - a literal impossibility – to actually live' (op cit: 24). Caffentzis thus ensures that his debate about the commons is not western-centric, and by including references to all the continents, offers a global picture of the commons.

It is possible, however, that concepts of the commons, even though they may emerge from different political camps, do not need to be viewed in the light of an anti-capitalist or pro-capitalist dichotomy in the way that is put forward by Caffentzis and Federici. For this is not the fundamental dichotomy, and focusing on it moves us away from the real task of reconceptualising the political and economic sphere, so that our place within the sphere is no longer defined by our relationship to capital, but something bigger. The notion of the commons put forward by Barnes and others as a third force, to counter the power of the market and of the state, suggests that we are no longer just looking at the question of capitalism or not capitalism; it is not just a way of opposing private ownership but suggests something distinct and different, something that is beyond this polarisation. Dawson's synopsis of the article by Caffentzis in his introduction includes the following: 'Caffentzis argues that a distinction between a pro-capitalist and an anti-capitalist definition of the commons is crucial if we are to understand and challenge new forms of hegemony' (Dawson 2010: 18). I argue that to call the 'commons movement' an 'anti-capitalist movement'

overlooks the depth and reach of the ontological shift that the commons discourse embodies (Bauwens 2011 (ii)), and that if we are to understand and contribute to developing the commons movement, we must precisely move beyond such a distinction; this argument is borne out by the words of some of the activists interviewed (see chapter 6) and is taken up in the final two chapters of this study. Esteva and Prakash pose the question: 'Are "the people" transforming the dominant institutions to improve them, or rather to replace them?' (Esteva & Prakash 1998:11)   Dawson describes these movements as 'anti-capitalist'; for example in his concluding paragraph he notes: 'the task facing the gathering forces of anti-capitalist resistance around the globe is daunting' (op cit: 22). While there is immense value in studying the history of movements to 'reclaim the commons' in the context of enclosures as capitalist accumulation, the argument of this thesis is that to appreciate the significance of the commons discourse in the contemporary context, it is of more value to consider it a momentum that takes us beyond this dichotomy.

Enclosure and Resistance

'Enclosure is thus a change in the networks of power which enmesh the environment, production, distribution, the political process, knowledge, research and the law. It reduces the control of local people over community affairs' (The Ecologist 1993: 69). 'The commons' describes what is taken away or diminished by the process of enclosure, whether material or non-material, and also that which is sought out and redeveloped in defence against the ongoing process of enclosure. 'It is arguably only in reaction to invasion, dispossession or other threats to accustomed security of access that the concept of common rights emerges. Today, such rights are evolving where access to seeds, air and other resources which were previously taken for granted are being challenged through commoditization, legal enclosure or pollution' (op cit: 11).

As we have seen, the process of enclosure is not defined by one period in history or one geographical place, and is a story that continues in the present moment, through the process of accumulation of the capitalist market. In many cases this involves land

acquired/enclosed and subsistence and small-scale farmers physically displaced, while another example is that of 'the seed enclosed', and the tightening of control over the agricultural market – from seed to supermarket shelf – by transnational companies, and the effect of this process on the livelihoods of millions of small-scale farmers who do not lose their land, but their power in the marketplace. Vandana Shiva is one writer who has been highly critical on the effects on agricultural producers in India of the introduction of the hybrid seeds of the Green Revolution, and more recently on the effects of other actions by Monsanto, which resulted in high levels of debt among many Indian farmers, which has been linked to large numbers of suicides (Shiva 2005).

Enclosure of the human experience through professionalization is an example of a non-material enclosure, and led Illich to comment: 'Enclosure of the commons is thus as much in the interest of professionals and of state bureaucrats as it is in the interest of capitalists' (Illich 1983). One example of this is the domination of the rules of mostly male professionals over the process of childbirth, with its tendency to ignore women's knowledge and disassociate them from the physical processes: 'Women's labour and knowledge are ignored: their only part in pregnancy and birth is to follow the instructions of the doctor. The direct organic bond with the foetus is substituted by machines and the knowledge of the professionals' (Shiva 1992:5). This is an enclosure through professionalization of knowledge that arguably has had a pernicious effect on both physical and emotional health, for example the US sustains an almost one in three rate of births by caesarean section, a steep rise that has occurred this century and which has been shown to suit the hospital professionals but in many cases increases rather than reduces risks to both mothers and babies (Althabe and Belizan 2006:1472-3).

A detailed history of the process of enclosure cannot be fitted into this study, and has been written about already with far more knowledge than I possess, providing us with great insights (e.g. Linebaugh 2008, The Ecologist 1993, Fairlie 2009, Federici 2004). The Ecologist make the point that though a global phenomena, it is in Britain between the 15th and the 19th centuries that the process of enclosure of commons 'became identifiable as a historical process...that spearheaded the drive towards an industrialized market economy' (The Ecologist 1993: 22-23). This historic process – the system of commons that was gradually

replaced, the part this played in the development of capitalism – is explored in some detail by these authors.

It is the resistance to this process of enclosure, of dispossession, that we now turn - the revolts, the protests, the alternatives, the levelling and the digging, the reclaiming, the occupying – and what evolves in the wake of resistance: the new models and the new discourses that are emerging as the status quo seems ever more plagued by financial, economic, political and environmental crises. Contemporary examples of these will be explored in more detail in the following chapters. There have been moments of resistance and experimentation with alternative modes of living throughout the ages. Federici has provided some illuminating examples of resistance in Europe that occurred in the crisis of feudalism but that largely failed to prevent the onset of capitalism, and which were often cruelly subjugated (Federici 2004). In the UK, we can trace a number of protest movements through the history of the revolutions and the establishment of parliament and later the establishment of the trade unions.

A contemporary 'planetary movement' has been identified by many of the authors under review (Bollier 2007 (i) and (ii), Esteva and Prakash 1998, Hawken 2007, Hemming 2011, Linebaugh 2008, Shiva 2005(i)). It is not a movement in the sense of a self-identified body with established aims. Indeed, it is characterised by what is often an explicit rejection of any attempt to specify pre-determined outcomes or globally applicable theories or solutions, defending instead the expression of the rights of communities to determine their own future. If it is a 'movement', it is a leaderless one, without any prescribed goals, unfolding in a thousand different localities under a thousand different local conditions. The importance that solutions should arise from the people and not be devised and imposed upon them by others is most strongly and eloquently put by the Zapatistas, and in the work of Gustavo Esteva. The Ecologist authors also make this the final recommendation of their book, closing with a justification for not concluding with any policy recommendations. Their point is that the power to apply them would be in the wrong hands: 'commons regimes emerge through ordinary people's day-to-day resistance to enclosure, and through their effort to regain the mutual support, responsibility and trust that sustain the commons' (The Ecologist 1993: 197).

The link between the local and the global - the connections between the diverse and

distinct local conditions and situations, and circumstances in other localities across the world – is an important aspect of this contemporary 'movement' (Esteva and Prakash 1998; Routledge 2004). The idea that behind the diversity there is some generalised experience is explored by Routledge as 'grassroots globalisation'. Esteva and Prakash countenance no global theorising, no attempt to apply one single vision or solution to multiple local contexts, for them all arises out of the local; yet at the same time they recognise that these individual, particularised local events and circumstances share some common ground: they note their 'increasing awareness that what we are perceiving and experiencing at the grassroots are not isolated or "unique" cases but conditions or situations that are generalized across the world' (Esteva & Prakash 1998:11). In my exploration of some examples of contemporary activism in the next section, I will examine this common ground, the conditions and the discourse that link local actions to a global experience.

For Esteva and Prakash, the recognition of a generalised experience linking different grassroots realities is highly inter-related with the search for a new language; for it is in order to be able to describe this new reality that they seek a new language. In 1998 they wrote that that the search for a new language, or a new epistemology, can never be completed until the outcomes of the struggle – the struggle that we can define as the struggle against political, economic and cultural enclosure and the struggle to safeguard or recreate commons - reach a certain point of maturity or solidity. More recently – and particularly with reference to activities since 2006 in Oaxaca – Esteva has given more explicit descriptions of the changes brought about by the Zapatistas, the Oaxacans and by many other communities in other parts of Latin America. About the Zapatistas he notes that 'their radical innovations clearly anticipate one of the shapes of the post-capitalist world' (Esteva 2012:195). Still linking in to the need for new definitions, he notes that 'the Zapatistas formulated their own political and epistemological reading of reality which begins with reclaiming the word – in a process of liberation from the categories imposed on them during 500 years of colonialism' (Esteva 2012:196).

Esteva's rejection of globalisation includes a highly critical approach to the ambition of Westerners involved in aid and development to provide assistance to 'developing' countries, encouraging them to focus instead on the cultures of their own countries. It was

Esteva who presented the idea that we have an exceptional tradition of commons in Britain that was worth thinking about, and could be related to my proposed doctoral thesis. I had already formulated my proposal around the notion of exploring the impact of grassroots activism on the development of democracy, and on the links between local activism and a global discourse. Now, Esteva had pointed to a local historic context and discourse within which could be placed the exploration of local contemporary activism, which would also link into a broader international context and discourse around the commons.

Others too, some already referred to plus many others (e.g. Harvey 2005, Maeckelbergh 2009, Routledge 2004) have also seen expressions of the commons and articulation of futures beyond capitalism within contemporary instances of activism. As Chatterton notes in a discussion about the 'urban common', 'the common…is simultaneously a defensive and productive act against these kinds of enclosures and oppressions. It is now nothing less than a key tactical repertoire in the struggle against spatial enclosure' (Chatterton 2010:627). Chatterton and Pickerill found this to be the case in their research project: 'Many participants, especially from LIDs (Low Impact Developments) and social centres, used the idea of the 'commons' as the spatial motif for their desire for self-management' (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010:484). Their findings also substantiate the case made for the commons taking us beyond a simple pro-or anti-capitalist, noting that 'the participants we engaged with express identities, practices and spatial forms that are simultaneously *anti-, despite-* and *post-* capitalist' (op cit: 475). While Chatterton and Pickerill found the connection to the local and the particular to be far stronger among activists than any sense of feeling a part of a global, transnational movement, Routledge finds that in response to the effects of neoliberal policies, 'new forms of translocal political solidarity and consciousness have begun to emerge, associated with the partial globalization of networks of resistance, involved, at least in part, in the defence of remaining commons resources' (Routledge 2004:1). These are not contradictory findings but reflect the different concerns of different groups of activists in different places. Routledge was looking specifically at instances of global networking among various grassroots groups, while Chatterton and Pickerill focused on locally based projects where activists were heavily involved with the day to day of their operations. If activists are responding in some sort to the enclosing process of

neoliberalism, then there is a thread that connects them even in their differences and particularities, and however much or little this global connection is articulated.

Before moving on to some particular examples of activists, we must briefly consider the meaning carried by the word-label 'activist'. Chatterton and Pickerill found among the activists they interviewed 'trends that include the rejection of binaries between activists and their other' (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010:479). A similar position will be explored in chapter five, asking for example when a 'citizen' becomes an 'activist' and arguing that many of us may take part in some manner of activism without calling ourselves activists. Chatterton and Pickerill note that the activist's 'other' is the 'non-militant, ordinary citizen'. Several of those I interviewed where however happy to describe themselves as activists.

Finally, to what extent does the researcher become an activist? The Autonomous Geographies Collective offers a thorough exploration of the tradition of 'scholar activism' within the field of geography. The authors note that 'while the literature offers tremendous insights, it also suffers from the 'ivory tower' syndrome of creating a false distinction between academia and wider society in terms of sites for social struggle and knowledge production' (Chatterton, Hodkinson and Pickerill 2009:4). This false distinction was explored in the opening chapter of this study. Unlike these and other researchers, my empirical research has not been an action-research project; the act of writing itself, however, can be seen as activism.

The texts explored in this chapter represent only a small sample of a wide range of discussions that have emerged from areas of interest and concern that include: social history, human rights, land rights, the environment, architecture and town planning, governance, local politics, grassroots activism, cultural studies, the market, radical critiques of capitalism and neoliberalism, reformative approaches to capitalism, and spiritual evolution. What these texts have in common is that they focus on the concept of the commons as a perspective and a language. Resistance and alternatives to capitalism find a language through the commons; the discourse is relevant to the activists; the activists contribute to the discourse. The language opens up new possibilities that the idea of the commons embodies in these texts. This chapter has filled out the exploration of the commons that has been introduced through

the previous two chapters, and has explored the relationship between the commons and historic and contemporary struggles against imperial and neoliberal capitalism. The language of the commons is characterised by a strong resistance to the capitalist growth agenda and a strong critique of neoliberalism. Ideas around the commons are also used in reformative approaches to capitalism. This chapter has included an analysis from an anti-capitalist perspective of these 'capitalist commons' and some discussion of this aspect of the commons discourse. This theme reappears in the final two chapters when this study reaches its final conclusion that this dualism does not contribute to our understanding of the significance of the commons, but rather that a theory of the commons moves beyond this dichotomy as it seeks to define emergent political and economic spheres.

Chapter 4

Riots, Protests and Grassroots Activism

The right to commons remains a demand for radical social movements in the twenty-first century, peasants still campaign for common land, and hackers fight for cyber-space without walls. (Wall 2014:87)

I would like the word foment to be a noun; to foment means 'to incite or promote the growth or development of (trouble, rebellion etc.)' (Penguin English Dictionary 2004) I would like be able to use this word to describe a state of foment(ing) – the incitement or promotion of the growth or development of (trouble, rebellion etc.). If there were such a noun, this is what I would use to describe what I felt as I embarked on the writing process ('ferment' does not quite cover it; for this is 'a state of unrest or upheaval' (op cit), which lacks the added sense of growth and movement towards of 'foment'). The word would also describe the world itself in and about which I write as environmental, financial, economic and political crises thunder across our human landscapes, bringing 'social unrest' in their wake.

At the end of 2010, such so-called 'unrest' burst upon the streets of British cities in the form of student protests against increased higher education tuition fees and other educational cuts – students and others were expressing their objection to policies that would create barriers to education, additional barriers to those reflected on in chapter one. In February 2011, it was in the streets of Cairo and Alexandria that a battle for power was being played out most notably, as the authority of the president and the Egyptian government was challenged by the gathering of hundreds of thousands of protestors voicing demands for change and for democracy; the so-called 'Arab spring' had taken off. This wave of protest appeared to have spread from Tunisia, the first Middle Eastern state to witness a public uprising in this recent episode, and then on to Yemen and Jordan, and to other countries too. These angry demands for democracy, it was much commented, occurred in response to increases in food prices, as well as a long duration of repressive rule. Later the same year the world witnessed the so-called Spanish 'revolution' of the 'indignados', an extraordinary display of public desire for a more equitable and open democratic system. Greece was the scene of wide-spread public protest in the face of an agenda of austerity and cuts. In August

2011, a wave of looting spread from the high street of Tottenham to other high streets across North London including my own neighbourhood of Wood Green, and then to other UK cities. Towards the end of 2011, the 'Occupy' movement spread from Wall Street to the City of London and to a thousand other cities across the world. These are just a few examples of protest and unrest that can be seen as a part of the manifestation of crisis across the globe at many levels.

In the previous two chapters, through a typology and a literature review, I have outlined many different concepts of what commons are and can be, and have begun to explore the discourse that has emerged around these concepts and the way in which these are informing approaches to social, environmental, economic and political life. Now, before returning in the final two chapters for a more detailed analysis of this discourse, I dedicate three chapters to grassroots activists. In the opening chapter, I presented the case that the work of the kind of grassroots activists that I was interested in has been overlooked and undervalued, though this oversight is beginning to be addressed in the wake of the world-wide events of 2011. A more in depth discussion of a wide range of activists will follow in this and the next chapter, mostly but not all contemporary, from the Zapatistas to Carlsson's 'pirate programmers, outlaw bicyclists, and vacant-lot gardeners' (Carlsson 2008), while chapter six offers a summary and analysis of seven interviews conducted with activists for the purposes of this research. These are not the traditional, middle-class subjects of the new social movements literature, nor is this an exploration of social capital. The wide range of actors whose actions I explore are attempting to change the status quo by protesting, by looking for new stories to tell about themselves, by actualising different realities – in dramatic or in small ways.

There is a certain focus on my own city of London. I have always wanted this research to be firmly linked into 'the local', and through the reflexive researcher, this becomes my experience of what is local to me; hence the space given in this chapter to the student protests of November 2010 and to the rioting that began in Tottenham and spread to other neighbourhoods in London and other cities of the UK in August 2011. I also reflect on the work of some local community groups in the London Borough of Haringey where I live. In the next chapter, I look at the case of the Occupy London Stock Exchange (LSX) encampment

outside St. Paul's Cathedral. Between all of these I draw links, which I also draw with events that have taken place in the rest of the world.

Linking the activists, theorists, practitioners, writers and researchers who use concepts of the commons in their work is a search for new forms of agency – personal, social, economic or political, or usually a combination of these, for each struggles to exist in the absence of the others. The manifestation of this search for a recovery of agency may be seen in local community-based projects including gardening, skill sharing and local currencies, or it may be a revolution in the jungles of Mexico, or it may be in the development of commons-based models for managing common pool recourses, or in new economic models such as those proposed through peer to peer production, all of which I will be exploring in the next chapter. Those involved may be primarily attempting to change relationships of power with their national government (as in the case of the Zapatistas), or with the market, or again most commonly with both; in some cases it may be a less concrete, more personally felt, cultural shift in relationship and increase in agency.

The Occupy movement perhaps owes its inspirational capacity to the way in which to a degree it combines all of these, not least the last. This combination has caused some confusion, and led to many people wanting to know what the demands and strategy of the movement actually were, missing the point that what was most important here was the process itself, the very occurrence of the encampments. As was noted in an editorial for an issue of *Red Pepper* magazine, echoing the point made by the Ecologist that while policies and strategies may be necessary and desirable to strengthen commons regimes, 'one cannot legislate the commons into existence' (The Ecologist 1993:196); commons regimes rather emerge through the processes of ordinary people's resistance to enclosure and efforts to re-establish the kinds of human relationships that sustain the commons:

> Occupy is not a political lobbying organisation trying to formulate policy message to communicate to elites. Assessing it solely on these terms misses a whole dimension of the change that Occupy and other horizontal spaces are advancing. This involves a lasting social transformation – a slow but sticky building up of empowerment, political voice and expectations of political involvement, and skills and methods of collective organising that can be shared with others and transferred to other spaces. This transformation, hidden in

cultural forms, is an essential prerequisite to securing lasting political change. But it is hard to measure, or even see happening, and therefore often undervalued. (Clifton 2012:3)

In this chapter, I take a brief look at some of the moments of social unrest that have occurred recently in the UK, in order to set the scene for the examination of grassroots activism, that follows in chapters five and six, and for the deeper exploration of the language of the commons that follows in the final two chapters. Some of the discussion links back to the exploration in chapter one of the relationship between academia and activism and to elitism, professionalization and barriers to participation. As part of a study of the changes being brought about by some agents, some space needs to be given for reflection on the existing culture of our societies. I tie these events – these moments of unrest - into a more general exploration of public and private space, which may be read as a metaphor for agency; from the aggressive taking over of space (and goods) seen in the riots, to the activist groups who attempt to express their rights to space in the city in other ways.

 The physical take-over of space in a riot or a demonstration draws attention by disrupting the normal flow of life, but also acts as a symbolic take-over, or claim-staking; the physical occupation is an assertion by voices previously denied, by opinions previously disregarded, demanding a hearing – people claiming 'ownership' of the political and the economic systems that govern them and in which they lack agency. The Zapatistas and the Occupy movements are two contemporary movements that exemplify this message. While the rioters cannot be described as being part of any social movement, their actions – and those of the police before, during, and after the riots, and also of the broader judicial arm of the state – invite profound questions about social justice.

Occupations have occurred throughout history, some mostly symbolic, some more pragmatic, but perhaps all a combination of both. Some occupations take place in an attempt to prevent action by obstructing passage – the anti-road protests are an obvious examples of these; and the symbolism of the acts of tunnelling into the ground, or of inhabiting trees, is poignant, and even if the activism is ultimately ineffective in its immediate aims, these images linger on to contribute to the gradual building of awareness of environmental concerns around the continued expansion of transport infrastructure as well

as other developments made in the name of economic growth and with little concern for environmental or social impact.

The women's camp at Greenham Common – a protest against nuclear weapons that went on for nearly two decades - is another example of an occupation that was more symbolic than pragmatic, despite several incursions into the camp and the use by the women of their own bodies to attempt to physically prevent the passage of military vehicles. What was perhaps more important than the measurable success of the camp in achieving its aims was the space that this occupation created for the women involved to meet in ways that their normal lives did not offer them. The diggers at St Georges Hill described in Matthew Fuller's 'Digger Barley' project (see chapter 3, p.44-45) were people who illegally occupied land in an attempt to create a livelihood through a communitarian approach – an act that was ideological as well as pragmatic. Fuller's piece celebrated this event in history, renewing its meaning for the 21st century.

Agency

I believe in certain things and I constantly challenge and review these beliefs (for one of my beliefs is that one should always challenge and review ones beliefs). Booth reminds us that counterorthodoxy is an essential dynamic within critical theory, whose 'intellectual spirit is to challenge all orthodoxies, including its own' (Booth 2005:259). But to write, to speak, even to exist, one cannot be without beliefs....The themes that I have chosen to focus this research on reflect some of these beliefs, which by the end of the research will have been challenged and reviewed through the dialogue I enter into with the people and the events that animate the world I find myself living in. I believe that people can change the world; they do – we all do – all the time. The question is which people have the most influence over the direction of change at any given time.

When a neighbour of mine says that she feels that it is useless trying to bring about any change – in the broad context of social justice – because nothing ever changes, I interpret that as meaning that she does not feel she has any influence over change. She feels

disempowered for some reason, out of touch with her own political agency. As a vegan she is concerned about, among other things, animal welfare and the effect of the use of chemicals on people and the environment; the choice she makes to eat a vegan diet reflects these personal priorities. Concerns over the use of chemicals and the treatment of animals in the food industry have grown considerably in influence over the last few decades, as part of the development of the environmental movement; witness the growth of the organic and free-range food industry and the polemic over GM foods, as just two examples. (One of the most recent concrete changes to animal welfare conditions brought about in the food industry as a result of public pressure is the EU-wide ban on battery cages for laying hens.)

My neighbour holds and lives out certain beliefs which, far from being exclusively private and personal, form part of a wider, shared public discourse that has contributed to, and continues to influence, the evolution of food growing and selling locally and globally. Her outlook and her actions – the choices she has made in those areas of her life that she had control over – have contributed to bringing about some elements of change, albeit being up against powerful vested interests that do continue to dictate the mainstream by holding by far the greater economic power; perhaps it is because of the latter that she feels that trying to change anything is a waste of time. That she has some agency is evident; but it is limited under current conditions. As we will explore further in our analysis of the commons, it might be concluded, as did one commentator reflecting on the financial crisis that caused so many to lose their homes and their jobs in the US and Greece respectively, that 'we have very little real agency in our economic lives' (Lanchester 2011:6) (see also chapter 2).

People do change, or form, the world in which they live, whether they believe it or not; the important questions are these: which people are changing the world the most, and how are they changing it - both in the sense of by what means do they reach the point of influence through which they can affect change, and what changes their influence brings about. My friend doesn't think she can change anything; I would argue that she is affecting the status quo just through buying or not buying certain products, and so has played her part in the growing availability of food in supermarkets in Haringey and across the western world which is produced with consideration for a range of environmental and social issues. Even though these still currently represent only a small percentage of the overall market, the 'fair

trade' and 'organic' markets, even if at times contentious, have seen rapid growth. She is, however, up against the mighty forces of the huge food-producing corporations that dominate the world production and retailing of food, such as the US giants Smithfield, Tyson, Swift & Co., and Cargill; the scale of this difference in power concerns many today.

Concerns about agency and about power underlie this research, hence the relevance of critical theory highlighted in chapter one. The difference between this neighbour and the other men and women included in this research is that they believe that they can take action to effect change. Some of this research focuses on contemporary events in my own immediate vicinity. By exploring links and parallels between local activism and events across the globe, I can illustrate how local actors embody global as well as local concerns and that local concerns also affect and influence other actors in other localities. The research also assesses whether there is a shared language that can be heard emerging from all these local concerns and voices, or whether they remain a multiplicity of disparate voices on the global stage.

This work has emerged not just through the reading and research that I have conducted, but also out of the specific circumstances of my own life. My experience of London is necessarily an intimate and subjective one that colours and affects this work. The content is defined by me the author, and the author draws on (and is partly defined by) her experience and knowledge, not only empirical knowledge. My knowledge about, and experience of, the world beyond the artificial borders of the London borough in which lies my current home, beyond the city, and beyond the nation state also influence me and have helped to create this work. Hence my own international background, derived from family roots (including French, German Jewish and Peruvian as well as English ancestry), language-learning, and travelling and working abroad, has influenced my experiences and outlook. I therefore recognise the value of personal conditions that inform the research, and also the agency that the researcher acts with through the researching into and writing about a selected subject.

Protesting about high entry costs of a different kind to those referred to by Shapiro (2007, see chapter one p.14) is what many students found themselves at the wrong end of a police baton for, during protests on the streets of cities across the UK in November 2011, as demonstrations against the government's plans to increase university fees unleashed an aggressive response by police in the streets of London that included charging the crowds with their horses and 'kettling' and saw numerous demonstrators bruised, injured and intimidated. It must be said here that in contrast to the norm described in the opening chapter, there has been a wave of commentary by politics lecturers and other academics in the media on the students' protests, in very 'human' language. Even the editor of the somewhat high-brow *London Review of Books* visited a student occupation, interviewed students and wrote up a long article about her experience (Biggs 2010:22). Perhaps after this we will see a higher level of reflection maintained within political studies on the extent and impact of the current resurgence of protest, direct action and other less visible forms of activism, and on how local contemporary activism forms part of a bigger picture when it is both linked with other examples of contemporary activism across the globe and is placed within a history of activism within the UK. Indeed as has been noted, and will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, this has manifested itself already to some degree, in the work of the 'OccupyIRtheory/IPE' *Facebook* group. Furthermore, in an article in the *New York Times*, one commentator notes that she expects a large cohort of 'notebook-wielding social scientists' to attend the 2012 May Day protests (Schuessler 2012).

As noted by Kivisto and Faist: 'Democracy, to persist, must be perpetually reinvented, which requires an active citizenry committed to the practice of participatory democracy' (Kivisto & Faist 2007:131). There are times when that commitment is expressed through protest. Kivisto and Faist's active citizenry, though a minority in terms of percentage of the population, were hard at work practising participatory democracy during these student protests. As an article by John McDonnell MP in the New Statesman's 'Political Studies Guide' noted as its headline, 'When students took over Tory HQ they reminded us that politics belongs in the streets too' (McDonnell 2010:12). McDonnell reflects that this new outburst of

protest will enliven the field of political study, 'but only if, using the old Marxist concept of praxis, it combines theory and practice' (ibid). Presumably Miles (chapter one p.14) would approve of McDonnell's concluding advice 'in the period ahead carry in one pocket a copy of Marx's *Wages, Price and Profit* but in the other keep close Bibi Van der Zee's *The Protestor's Handbook*' (ibid).

McDonnell also commented in the *Guardian* newspaper's 'Comment is Free' section on the G20 march that took place in London on 28th March 2009 and asked a question that now, in the light of the events of the 'Arab spring', 'Spanish revolution' and the 'Occupy' movements, appears prophetic: 'Do the so-called world leaders sitting at the summit table realise the depth of anger that is brewing up in communities across the world?' (McDonnell 2009). He concluded that if the summit failed to make a start in setting an agenda that addressed their issues, then 'the need for mass protest and direct action will prove to be not just justified but necessary' (ibid).

It is worth reflecting for a moment on how universities provided a forum for engagement and debate to both these protest movements – though without the blessing of their VC's. If voices from politics departments have at times failed to engage with current events, and universities attempted to stifle debate, some of the student population have been making up for the deficit. The University of East London closed its campus and cancelled all lecturers for Wednesday 1st and Thursday 2nd April 2009 fearing that demonstrators would use the university as a base for protest at the ExCel centre where the G20 Summit meetings would be held on Thursday 2nd. An 'alternative G20 Summit', which had been planned at the University, was therefore held on the university's lawn in the evening of Wednesday 1st, where speakers addressed a crowd of 200-300 people. Tony Benn, one of the speakers, pointed out to the crowd: 'What university this is that shuts its doors when the world is in crisis. We are at war, the economic system has broken down and they will not let us into their buildings to discuss it, but we will speak about it out here' (Benn 2009).

In response to the threatened fees increase, student occupations began in several universities across the UK late in November 2010. These were far more than sit-ins. Some of them became highly organised communication centres and classrooms of activism and

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democracy. Students networked with workers as well as with those demonstrating in the streets. They engaged with the legal aspects of participating in illegal direct action, and practised non-hierarchical methods of decision making that characterise much modern day activism, and engaged with the media. These students, as many before them, were occupying their own university; but now with the help of modern technology they were able to claim a wider space. Over their first night, students at University College London (UCL) had set up a website, a blog, a twitter feed and an email address. From then on, they were able to draw together all the mainstream media reporting of events, commenting on them and providing links to all the online articles. Regular blogs sent their message out to the world (and to their vice-chancellor); on the days of the demonstrations they became a much needed support centre for those who suffered injury or the trauma of kettling; and they received visits from supportive politicians, lecturers, trade union representatives and others. As noted in an article by a BBC News education correspondent, 'the protests that took place last week weren't organised by any conventional political organisation, but they managed to mobilise youngsters in towns and cities from Bournemouth to Edinburgh. It was run through social networking websites, with little centralised control' (Coughlan 2010).

Solidarity across traditional divisions characterises much present day protest. As Laurie Penny, a blogger for the *New Statesman* commented in the *Guardian* regarding the student protests:

> The young people of Britain do not need leaders, and the new wave of activists has no interest in the ideological bureaucracy of the old left....Anarchists and social democrats are obliged to work together alongside school pupils who don't care what flag you march under as long as you're on the side that puts people before profit. (Penny 2010)

Reporting on the G20 protestors in London in April 2009, the *Guardian* newspaper printed a 2-page report on the 'rainbow alliance of summit protestors' who were 'drawn from a wide political spectrum, from anarchists to pillars of the establishment from the church and parliament'. The article lists the Stop the War Coalition; academics and intellectuals; anarchists; Rising Tide; Climate Camp; artists; Church groups; charities; development groups; Unions; pressure groups; students; MPs; independents; and foreign

groups. There would have been many more named groups present of course. For example, individuals from Haringey may have gone as independents, but may also have gone under a number of different banners including Sustainable Haringey, Haringey Solidarity Group, or any one of the numerous Haringey residents' associations. Not only do separate groups merge into coalitions to protest about issues that affect them all, but individual groups take up the issues of others. For example, one of the demands of the UCL occupation was that the university pay UCL cleaners the London living wage; in another example of this sort of solidarity and cross-fertilisation prevalent in present day activism, when students protested against the closure of the philosophy department at Middlesex University, they were joined for a day of action by Plane Stupid, the direct action network against airport expansion.

The students protesting against university fees support, and find themselves supported by, other groups across the country, and it is clear that many groups representing citizens who are or will be affected by the coalition government's cuts will come together in protest. Wider links can also be explored. The title of McDonnell's article referred to earlier is 'We are many', the rallying call of activists across the globe that originated from the Zapatistas – so a connection to protest and activism worldwide is articulated. McDonnell also links the demonstrations with a historic tradition in Britain: '... there is a neglected history of radicalism in this country that has regularly, generation after generation, exhibited itself in protect and direct action' (McDonnell 2010:12).

Bibi Van der Zee interviews Ha-Joon Chang for the same 'Political Studies Guide 2011', talking to him about his recent book *23 Things They Didn't Tell You About Capitalism.* In response to a question about his notion of 'active economic citizenship' he notes: 'For a very long time we've been told that economics is very, very complicated, and so technical you have to be specially trained to understand it. Which is a very convenient way to shut people up' (Van der Zee 2010:15). Voters have largely been excluded from participation in debate or decision-making about economic matters; indeed debate about economic alternatives has only recently opened up, and the conversation is still limited. As noted in the publication by The Political Studies Association (PSA) with which this guide was delivered, in an examination of the progress and contributions of political studies and its sub-fields: 'the hegemony of narrow-minded economists' has dictated the politics of development by dominating the

culture of the IMF, and 'neo-classically trained economists have historically shown open contempt for non-economic factors affecting development, even after repeated evidence that their apolitical economic models are less than useless when applied to the real world' (Heyward 2010: 20). The protesting at the World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle was much commented on as birthing a global justice movement that speaks out against this hegemony, and that has continued to be heard across the globe at international summits.

As the New Statesmen's supplement was delivered with this publication by the PSA, I have used an example drawn from the latter to suggest links between the narrowness of economic models that have determined national as well as international development, a historic lack of dialogue between political studies and politics on the ground in the UK, and the lack of political will to countenance dissent or even debate. Surely the largely un-bridged gap between political studies in the academy and the day-to-day political events of the real world described by Miles subtly endorses and reinforces the lack of space for engagement by anyone outside the political classes in the political process and in decision making about issues that affect people's everyday lives: decisions about the economy; and decisions – or lack of decisions – about how to cope with environmental issues such as pollution, climate change and peak oil. People, rightly, feel excluded from decision making, and perceive that their needs and their voices are not taken into consideration by those who do make those decisions. This is not new, though the level of violent repression unleashed by the police at the students' demonstration was as surprising to many as the force of the protest itself, as were the levels of engagement seen in the university occupations. Many people had taken for granted that young people had become too depoliticised and self-interested to put up such a protest. As Dr Andrew Mycock, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Huddersfield, commented on the demonstrations against the proposed fee cuts: 'Students and young people protesting against the education cuts are representative of a generation who have been consistently overlooked by politicians who have little regard for their democratic voice' (Mycock 2010).

In August 2011, a wave of rioting and looting spread across a number of London's high streets, from Enfield to Peckham; within twenty-four hours of the first rioting, the looting had spread to several other major cities such as Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester; and then it went on to erupt in Gloucester. The responses from the media included expressions of disgust, calls to bring back the water cannons to deal with the 'scum', and indignant responses to anyone who attempted to discuss the socio-economic context of the riots and lootings. While for some this was, as it was put by David Cameron, 'criminality - pure and simple' (Prime Minister's Office 2011), others tried to unravel what may have lain behind this outburst that shook the nation, albeit for a few days only. Politically the latter approach was almost impossible to maintain initially, and any commentator who dwelt even briefly on exploring possible causes of the riots was immediately accused of condoning rioting and looting. As time went by reflection on the wider issues lying behind the riots became more generally accepted. Simultaneously, though, tough sentences out of proportion to the acts, and generally considerably higher than normal sentences for equivalent acts, became the norm, and a strengthening of police powers in dealing with protest was considered that would permit the future use of water cannons, plastic bullets and even live ammunition (Stevens 2011).

While the approach of some commentators to the latter events was to define these simply as acts of mindless criminality, others reflected on the context. One perspective is of a generation encouraged by high levels of advertising in a highly consumerist society to value the acquisition of material goods but excluded from participation through unemployment and therefore denied access to those rewards which remain to be seen but not touched – the unwanted children of neoliberalism. The events can be analysed in the context of two relationships: that between citizens and the police, reflecting the wider relationship with the state; and that between citizens and the consumer goods that are the fruits of capitalism, or in other words, the market. Thus we find ourselves looking at the military-industrial complex, seen within which the actions of the rioters and looters take on a deeper meaning. While we must recognise the fear caused to individuals by the eruption of looting, and in a few cases

the physical harm and damage done to their homes and businesses, the challenge that these rioters represented to the status quo goes far beyond this, as evidenced by the tough sentencing and the increase in police powers that were the response of the state.

The trigger for the unrest was the fatal shooting of a man of Afro-Caribbean descent in Tottenham by police; this holds faint echoes of the Rodney King riots that took place in Los Angeles in 1992. Poor communication from the police to the family of the dead man resulted in a demonstration outside the police station on Tottenham High Road in the evening of Saturday 6th August. When the gathered crowd failed to get the response they wished for – they were not spoken to by any representative of the police force, despite their requests – they prepared to disband, but the violence then erupted. The rioting and looting that followed, around London and in other places, cannot be explained only by anger over the death of the man in Tottenham at the hands of the police, nor by the way in which the death was subsequently handled. Such anger does not necessarily express itself in the looting of goods, nor is the looting of goods commonly defended by its perpetrators with such a moral justification. However, the relationship between the police and the citizens is compromised when the police are responsible for a civilian death...Does that help to explain how that event served to spark a wave of looting? If the police were seen not to be upholding law and order, but to be protecting an elite – or at least, to be abusing a persecuted minority – did they lose enough of their legitimacy in the eyes of some to warrant the temporary and localised attack on shops and property that followed?

In an extraordinary session of Newsnight, the opposing poles in the argument that ensued in the commentary about the events were brought together. Paul McKenzie (The Sun), Reveal (rap artist), a student and a woman representing a group of mothers of victims argued it out. The most striking speaker was the rap artist. First his very presence on the show: this was surely the first time that a rap artist was invited onto Newsnight. He articulated the thoughts that saw the actions of those who rioted and looted in the context of corporate greed and a 'hypocritical and corrupt state'. He spoke with far less aggression than Paul McKenzie from the *Sun* newspaper. Though many young people out on the streets may not have identified politically with this view, some who were interviewed did express such feelings. Another young Afro-Caribbean man spoke, as many have done, of anger in the

streets; several interviewees from the streets of Tottenham broadcast on live radio had mentioned simmering resentment against the police since the implementation of the stop and search bill.

What was played out on the streets can also be seen as a reaction to the market and the state by a generation encouraged by high levels of advertising in a highly consumerist society to value the acquisition of material goods, but excluded from participation. They did not wait to earn the money they needed to purchase the goods that had been so effectively advertised to them throughout their lives; they helped themselves when they found that they could; instead of buying power, they used physical power, breaking down windows to take mobile phones, television sets, clothes and shoes. They played cat and mouse with the police; in some instances this was no doubt part of the appeal; in other instances, such as in Wood Green, there was no police presence at all for many hours of the looting, which itself raised some questions. They defied the requirement imposed by the status quo that would have us earn the right/money to acquire material goods, some of which we need to live, but much of which is for non-essential factors: status symbol, hi-tech entertainment; thus the military-industrial complex was temporarily undermined. One voice on twitter reflected that while the young people of Egypt rose up and demanded democracy, our young people rose up and took plasma-screens. Maybe this pejorative assessment can be turned round, and we can argue that the looting represented an act of defiance that in a highly consumerist society where we may be felt to be judged by the value of our material goods, bears an element of symbolic power that should not be underestimated. While there have been many attempts to understand and explain the behaviour of those who were seen live on national television taking over the streets, confronting the police and looting, there will be no clear or single answer. Nonetheless, that these events are a symptom of some sort of a social malaise cannot be ignored. Whether we apportion the greater blame to the threat of cuts of the Lib-Con coalition, or whether we blame previous governments under whose watch inequality in the UK has been increasing since the mid-1970s (OECD 2011), the crisis remains the same – and by rejecting the case that this is just a matter of thuggish behaviour, of rampant criminality, we admit to a social crisis of a different, more complex nature. Those who participated were not of one single ethnic group, did not represent only one socio-economic

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class, and were not all young, or all male; it is the troubles in Gloucester that have most baffled onlookers. In a case of the emperor having no clothes, the ease with which the high streets and the goods that they housed were surrendered to those who accessed them by force over those few nights made me wonder why they had waited so long to do it, if it was that easy. It is also easy to draw parallels between the actions of the looters on the one hand and certain of the bankers, financiers and politicians who have been involved in recent financial crises:

> When placed within the context of rising unemployment in the UK, government cutbacks, rising student fees, MPs expenses scandals, bankers bonuses, public bailout of banks, the looting makes perfect sense. Looting is opportunistic, but then so is insider trading, and the greed that accompanies the acceptance of extravagant severance payouts... In the context of all this and a rampant capitalist system, the looters had perfect role models. If bankers can cook the books and MPs take cash for questions, and can fiddle their expenses, what could this underclass of youth do to further their own interests? How could they get their noses in the trough? What options did they have? (Wight 2012:165)

By understanding these acts of rioting and looting as being indicative of a lack of political and economic agency, we can see them as part of this story about the commons. The streets and shops are 'reclaimed' from the power of the market and the state - albeit violently and transiently. That the power of the state and of private business is in crisis in a much wider sense is evidenced in the multiple crises and protests affecting the world in the early 21st century.

The riots became the subject of a play commissioned by the Tricycle Theatre (Kilburn, London). 'The Government originally refused a Public Inquiry into the riots that shook our cities this summer, so the Tricycle Theatre mounted its own.' So ran the promotion for the event on the website of the Bernie Grant Arts Centre (Tottenham, London Borough of Haringey), where the play was staged in January 2012 after its initial run at the Tricycle. The Tricycle described itself as 'responding to contemporary issues and events with its ground-breaking 'tribunal plays' and political work'; it won the Liberty Human Rights Art Award in 2010 (Tricycle Theatre 2011). The play – simply called The Riots – was entirely based on

'spoken evidence', mostly interviews conducted by Gillian Slovo and also researcher Cressida Brown between 12th September and 10th October 2011. The actors played the role of those whose testimony is presented in the play, speaking the actual words of a selection of these interviews.

The writer of this play was Gillian Slovo, one of the children of Joe Slovo and Ruth First, who both worked for the Communist Party of South Africa and the African National Congress; First was killed by a bomb parcel in 1982 in Maputo. After the opening performance at the Bernie Grants Arts Centre, a talkback was held which included Gillian Slovo, Stafford Scott, (Community Activist and major character in the play), Jude Lanchin (Bindmans, Criminal Defence Lawyer) and Gina Moffatt (Tottenham's Pride of Britain Award Winner 2011). Scott gave an account of how he responded to the phone call he received from Gillian Slovo, initially rebuffing her approach but then remembering the name Slovo – finally remembering who that was, and that in his youth he had been taken by Bernie Grant to meet Joe Slovo. Scott told us that being interviewed by Gillian Slovo was different to his experience of being interviewed by 'most other white people', who made him feel as if they were trying to trip him up, catch him out. Slovo told the audience that Scott 'understood politics' in a way that few people do today. This partnership between Slovo and Scott that was made possible through the link with Joe Slovo suggests another way of responding to the Tottenham riots. For these riots, if not the riots elsewhere, were largely about race, and all the riots were to some extent about class. The demonization of the white working class that Jones, one of the voices in the play, describes in his book 'Chavs' is also experienced by black and ethnic minorities, these groups becoming linked by their socio-economic position and the scape-goating they become subjected to (Jones 2011). This is explored further in the next chapter.

Reclaiming public spaces

Naomi Klein is one writer who presents extensive research on the reach of corporate power into peoples' lives, and resistance to it particularly in US urban spaces, in a book

entitled: 'No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo' (Klein 2000). The focus of much of the book is the effect of advertising and branding and other aspects of corporate power on public space and cultural life in the US, linked also with the socio-economic conditions of the workers who produce most of the goods that are exported and sold to consumers in the US. City pavements have not yet been referred to as commons as far as I am aware, and yet they are. In the case of London, they are privately owned, but all people have freedom of access to them – an urban 'right to roam' - but do we take this too much for granted? Is this right becoming limited to shoppers? Every time a shopping mall springs up, our right of access is curtailed, for here the rules of private property apply and there are usually rules controlling entry and behaviour, such as no smoking and no 'hoodies'. Klein argues that unless you are a shopper – and look like you intend to and can afford to shop – you are persona non grati in these spaces (op cit). Developments in some city centres are even more subtle. For example in Liverpool, without putting a roof over the top of it, an 'enclosure' was made of an area around Hope Street – once the stronghold of the Chinese community – that saw the first privatisation of an outdoor, urban area and the consequent control over entry and usage replacing an absolute freedom of access that was never considered because nobody would have thought that it could be taken away (Kingsnorth 2008).

In Haringey, the Wards Corner Community (WCC) Coalition have been fighting development plans that would see the demolition of homes, shops and an Edwardian indoor market currently housing hundreds of small local businesses (homes and businesses which serve people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds almost exclusively) and the building of eight-storey blocks of privately-owned flats and retail space for chain stores and a national supermarket in their place. In June 2010, the WCC Coalition won an important victory in a Judicial Review test case. The press release from the law firm representing the Coalition states the following: 'The Court of Appeal handed down a ruling that Haringey Council had acted unlawfully by not properly considering the impact on Tottenham's diverse local community of planned new housing and retail developments. The case is the first to decide that local authorities must assess impact in race equality terms before authorising major developments' (Bindmans 2010). A key activist involved in the work shared with me the reflection that it had taken three years and thousands of pounds just to achieve an

acknowledgement that the community should be allowed a voice. To think this a meagre outcome for a long struggle, however, would be to underestimate the forces that were taken on in this protest, and miss the relevance of this success. This journey - the protest, the fund-raising, the alternative community-led development proposal and the legal process - is an example of what it takes to pave the way for the 'new acts' that Nick Couldry proposes in his book 'Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism': 'a post-neoliberal politics only gets moving if it articulates ways of organising society, the economy and politics that *enable* voice to *matter*' (Couldry 2010:137). According to the WCC's website:

> The Coalition is a unique grassroots movement that has no traditional structure or recognised leaders and utilises a range of practices in mobilisation and campaigning. The movement is entirely founded on the ideals of inclusiveness and collaboration: the website, for example, is collectively and organically built by contributors. (Wards Corner 2011)

Bollier might consider the WCC Coalition's legal success to be an example of 'the beginnings of a new movement to make property law and markets more compatible with a larger set of ethical, environmental and democratic values' (Bollier 2007(ii):6). For more than thirty years, neoliberalism has declared that market functioning trumps all other social, political and economic values; neoliberalism should be understood as a profound and powerful mode of cultural politics as well as an economic discourse (Couldry 2010). Through the noting of the legal relevance of the Race Relations Act to the development in question, this culture has not only been challenged but legally required to make an adjustment, not just for the present case; Bindmans notes in its press release: 'The Court of Appeal's decision has major implications for planning and development' (Bindmans 2011).

Acts of engagement with politics are being seen increasingly not within formal processes or parties, but in the streets and in communities, in informal alliances and groups. Time Magazine made 'The Protestor' their 'Person of the Year' for 2011. Stengel noted: 'Protests have now occurred in countries whose populations total at least three billion people, and the word protest has appeared in newspapers and online exponentially more this past year than at any other time in history' (Stengel 2011:41). The next chapter examines a range of examples of activism, drawing links between apparently disparate groups through

the interwoven themes of resisting privatisation and demanding a democratic voice: reclaiming the commons.

Chapter 5

Walking on the Commons: The Activists

In the end, it must be the capacity of some social movements to speak to the poverty of the contemporary political imagination that gives them significance beyond their immediate demands, achievements and even failures. (Walker 2005:143)

Activists from a diverse range of settings in countries across the globe have voiced opposition to the ambitions of neoliberalism, to the status quo imposed by repressive states and to a lack or paucity of democracy. While disparate, emerging from sometimes contrasting social and political environments, their voices merge in a call to restore the human to politics and to reclaim politics to the service of the people. The resonance of these individual voices is not negligible for they echo in a political chamber that has shown itself bereft of such vision or such commitment. The previous chapter focused on some specific occurrences of protest linked with a deficit of democratic voice; in the next chapter the individual voices of seven activists will be heard through an analysis of the interviews conducted for this thesis. I have begun to show how many occurrences of protest and activism are linked together through a shared language – the commons – that is able to articulate some of the values and the approaches of these initiatives. This chapter explores a range of activism from anti-capitalist protests to small locally-based challenges to neoliberalism and corporate power to show how the story of the commons goes some way to answering the dearth of vision and alternatives described in the opening chapter, and to reinvigorating failing democratic practices.

New insights into the nature, prevalence, influence and political significance of contemporary instances of protest and grassroots activism are required. Particular attention is given in this study to arguing that democratic processes are invigorated by some contemporary activism, and that therefore a new theory of political agency is needed. The work of activists is forming the future, and the changes needed to bring about greater environmental and social responsibility are brought about partly by influence from the grassroots. As Stengel wrote on the awarding of Time's 2011 Person of the Year to 'the Protestor' (see chapter 4, p.85), 'protest is in some ways the source code for democracy –

and evidence of the lack of it' (Stengel 2011:41). The protestors and activists who are the subject of this study challenge the lack of democracy in the status quo but also embody and present new possibilities and new politics through their visions.

An international grassroots movement

Many of the instances of protest and activism identified in this research bring new elements to what has been called the global justice movement, or the anti-globalisation movement. Small-scale, locally focused activism, however, often remains largely invisible; it tends not to reach the media headlines, groups are often not registered in any formal way as are larger groups and NGOs, and may have no formal affiliations or networks. It has been suggested that as well as being more numerous than is generally recognised, they are also more powerful than many might have assumed but their activities tend to be overlooked by mainstream media, academics, business and political parties (Hawken 2007; Scholte 2005). Esteva and Prakash (1998) describe this as an 'unfolding post-modern epic at the grassroots', identifying 'the diverse content and scope of grassroots endeavours' carried out by 'ordinary men and women' struggling to free themselves from what they call the 'Global Project' (op cit: 1).

Esteva and Prakash offer perspectives which help us to identify the people and the actions that we mean when we refer to 'grassroots activists' in this thesis. In their analysis of the term 'grassroots' they recognise that it is an ambiguous word, but they use it 'because its political connotation identifies it with initiatives and movements coming from "the people": ordinary men and women, who autonomously organize themselves to cope with their predicaments' (op cit: 3). They are 'post-modern' in that they are 'pioneering radical post-modern paths out of the morass of modern life', conditions that have been largely imposed on them by 'modernisation', a 'gulag that means certain destruction for their cultures' (ibid). They are writing about those that they call the 'social majorities', to whom the elements of the modern world familiar to the 'social minorities' are totally unfamiliar. (Through these terms they differentiate between those whose lives are basically westernised, the

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'minorities', and those who have no access to most of the goods and services that define the average standard of living among the former group). In this study, we identify that some people from the 'social majorities' do the same, however. Despite their access to 'the goods', they recognise the losses and the threats, the social and environmental dead-ends, the increasing disparities of wealth which result from the economics of neoliberalism, and they seek to build alternatives. As part of the anti-globalisation movement we have witnessed many instances of solidarity between the social 'majorities' and 'minorities', often taking place over cases of environmental protection. In the following chapter, we will hear the voices from grassroots activists from among the 'social majorities' who also pioneer paths out of the 'morass of modern life'.

While Esteva and Prakash describe the 'social majority' activists as 'fully immersed in their local struggles' (op cit: 1), Rutherford describes that 'an extraordinary array of social movements, single issue campaigns and community actions reflect a growing level of political activity that is often global in its dimension' (Rutherford 2008:17). There is no contradiction between a local focus and a global dimension; much of the grassroots activism is a response to local effects of neoliberalism's 'global project' (Esteva and Prakash 1998, see above).

There is as much that differentiates these culturally diverse campaigns and actions as links them. Nonetheless, and as this thesis argues, in this multitude of different instances of grassroots activism around the world, some have identified a common thread that has been described as attempts to 'reclaim the commons' (e.g. Bollier 2003, Klein 2001, Linebaugh 2008, Shiva 2005). Bollier (2007(i)) has spoken about a 'brave, decentralized movement' whose 'focus... is the commons' (op cit:1), calling these activists 'commoners' who 'are now starting to find each other, a convergence that augurs great things' (op cit:10). Describing the present day enclosures that are responded to by initiatives to 'reclaim the commons', Shiva (2005(i)) refers back to the enclosures of the commons in England: 'While these first enclosures stole only land, today all aspects of life are being enclosed – knowledge, culture, water, biodiversity, and public services such as health and education. Commons are the highest expression of economic democracy' (op cit: 3). Thus, as we explore in this chapter, the thread winds its way through history as well as across the globe.

At the Be the Change conference in London in November 2007, at which activists

from many countries gathered to discuss environmental, social and economic justice initiatives, a film of environmentalist and journalist Paul Hawken speaking at another conference was presented. While he addressed that conference, a list of names of community groups from across the world rolled like credits on a screen behind him, as he explained that this list could roll on throughout the entire three days of the conference and still not reach its end. Hawken was illustrating his point that through his work he had begun to become aware of the number of small, disparate groups across the world that are working in local contexts towards social and environmental justice. This 'slowly grew into a hunch that something larger was afoot, a significant social movement that was eluding the radar of mainstream culture' (Hawken 2007:2). Gathering information through various sources including tax census data and sector-specific indexes and databases, he presents a convincing case for a guesstimate of somewhere between one and two million such groups globally. He calls this phenomenon a 'movement of movements' (see also Klein 2001), which he describes as a 'global humanitarian movement arising from the bottom up' (Hawken op cit: 3).

According to Hawken, the 'key contribution' of this 'broad nonideological movement' is 'the rejection of one big idea'; instead, it 'engages citizens' localised needs' (op cit: 18). Nonetheless there is something that 'binds its constituents' which is 'a modus operandi that could be called the autonomy of diversity': 'If the movement in all its diversity has a common dream, it is process – in a word, democracy, but not the democracy practiced and corrupted by corporations and nation-states. It is, rather, a reimagination of public governance emerging from place, culture, and people' (ibid). Hawken alludes here to a freeing and a re-locating of politics beyond its traditional setting, recognition that political actions take place beyond the parameters of state power. As Graeber describes the case in the US: 'If Occupy Wall Street has spread to every city in America, it's because our financial overlords have brought us to such a pass that anarchists, pagan priestesses, and tree-sitters are about the only Americans left still holding out for the idea that a genuinely democratic society might be possible' (Graeber 2011). Discussing social movements and world politics, Walker notes the tendency for analysis of social movements to have been taken up by sociologists rather than students of politics, pointing to the difficulty in speaking about politics on other than statist terms which reveals the capture of the political into the dominant model of state sovereignty

and supremacy (Walker 2005). It is precisely this that underlines the importance that should be given to 'structures and practices that exceed the limits of the official political boundaries' (op cit: 142).

These groups usually form around local issues but may also connect in a global context. This connectivity is evident through the increasingly global nature of the contexts - social, economic, political and environmental - with which issues experienced at local levels are often inextricably bound. Furthermore, we can identify a certain commonality, not simply in the demands that are made for more power and representation, but in the models and discourse that are emerging, largely from the grassroots, which go beyond demanding to describing new ways of imagining and practising democratic processes (Maeckelbergh 2009). The success of these processes cannot be measured by the extent to which demands are met, and any analysis of the impact of these instances of activism cannot simply focus on outcome, as noted by Walker (op cit) and as has been said about Occupy (e.g. Clifton 2012 see chapter 4, p.69).

Alternative visions and practices are thriving at the grassroots, nurtured to some extent by the development of the new technologies of the social media revolution: the growing 'people power' of the post-industrial information or knowledge society of the 21st century, is 'expanding the powers of individual and collective actors against large institutions' (El-Ojeili and Hayden 2006: 32). A set of values and practices emerging from these practices contribute to a growing understanding of the meaning and significance of the commons. The language developing around the concepts and practices regarding the commons may be seen to embody Hawken's 'common dream' of 'process'. The new models of organisation emerging from practice influenced and inspired by an awareness of the commons help to counter the power of corporations and states and go some way towards manifesting this dream of process, this reimagination of governance – and towards a new, post-capitalist democracy, beyond Lockean paradigms of the supremacy of individual property rights, and beyond the neoliberal market state. Grassroots activism thus has the ability to generate the sort of alternative visions to neoliberalism currently absent from much of mainstream politics.

Many of these groups have not initiated action as a self-conscious part of a

transnational movement, though transnational networks and solidarity have evolved and become an important support and a very recognisable aspect of contemporary activism. Nonetheless, as Klein reminds us, many identify a movement as having being born in the protests at the World Trade Organisation talks at Seattle in 1999, while others link it back to 1st January 1994 and the Zapatista uprising or even back to anti-colonial struggles of the past five hundred years. Klein asks how far the so-called anti-globalisation movement is against globalisation and whether it is a movement arguing it is better described as a broadening series of different struggles against privatisation: 'Thousands of groups today are all working against forces whose common thread is what might broadly be described as the privatization of every aspect of life, and the transformation of every activity into a commodity' (Klein 2001:81-82, see also chapter 2, p.26). Klein argues that 'a spirit of resistance is taking hold around the world. People are reclaiming bits of nature and of culture, and saying 'this is going to be public space' (op cit: 82). We can describe what lies behind these acts of reclaiming 'bits of nature and culture' as 'attempts by local people to reclaim the political process and to re-root it within the local community' (The Ecologist 1993:188).

In this account of grassroots activism and the reclaiming of the commons, the focus is on participation, power relations and governance and the need for more equitable representation at the international level to make decisions that meet the needs of people – and the environment also (the two of which are inextricably linked: in the immediate term, for many who live close to the land; in the longer term, for all of humanity) - rather than corporations. In this context, the high levels of solidarity and support that have formed in recent decades, creating alliances that may have seemed hitherto unlikely between activists from Western, urban centres and indigenous peoples for example, can be understood. For as Hough notes, sustainable strategies for environmental issues are often impeded by sovereignty and big business interests while 'indigenous forest dwellers often develop a culture of sustainability in adapting to their surroundings, making them better custodians of woodlands than outside corporate interests' (Hough 2014:114). In the following chapter, the story of the British activist Miriam who works with communities across the world whose land is under threat of exploitation by the mining company Vedanta is an example of this sort of alliance; an alliance rooted for Miriam in the reality that Vedanta's operation is endorsed and

encouraged by the financial world at the heart of City of London – Graeber's 'financial overlords' referred to earlier. As a more renowned activist noted with regard to her work against the introduction of GM crops: 'This is not a case of US versus the EU, but clearly Monsanto versus civil society' (Shiva 2005 (ii)). As Cavanagh (1997) noted in his exploration of corporate responsibility: 'It will be citizen movements creating pressure on governments and directly on corporations that will be central in the creation of…mechanisms to promote corporate accountability' (op cit:103).

This study has placed the movement to 'reclaim the commons' in an historical context, going back to the enclosures of land as well as of economic, political and cultural space brought about by the establishment of the global economy over the last five centuries, exploring the case in pre-industrial England and in the colonies, and in developed countries today. It has referred to the significance of Magna Carta as a source of protection against tyranny, and how its companion, the Charter of the Forest, enshrined and protected the subsistence rights of the poor (Linebaugh 2008). The relevance of Linebaugh's new historical interpretation is that in its affirmation of the history of liberty, it also maps out a way forward – towards a restoration of political rights through a renewal of economic and social rights. Echoing Linebaugh's analysis of enclosure, while reflecting on the contemporary situation, Klein notes that 'Every protected public space has been cracked open, only to be re-enclosed by the market' (Klein 2002:xix), and that 'fences that protect the public interest seem to be fast disappearing, while the ones that restrict our liberty keep multiplying' (op cit: xx).

A new approach to the link between local and global issues is also called for in order to describe the relationship between activism rooted in particular localities and approaches to resolving issues that are global by nature and in their impact. The model of the commons can be used to describe the new terms of this relationship between the local and the global. The Zapatistas, for example, presented highly localised needs, expressing the desire of a small group for autonomy; yet they linked their action plainly to NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and articulated their aims in a language that deliberately linked their hopes and their struggle to the hopes and struggles of other communities around the globe. They did not express in their rebellion any specific desire for an ethnically based national revolution (they did initially call for the overthrow of the national Mexican government, but

this was a short lived goal), but called out to all people oppressed by the economic, political or social power of a ruling elite.

In a similar vein, this new picture of activism calls for a new awareness of the possibility of difference within unity (Hawken's 'autonomy of diversity' (Hawken 2007) and Quilligan's 'global humanity' (Quilligan 2011)). In Marianne Maeckelbergh's analysis of what she calls the alterglobalisation movement, the link between diversity and singularity is explored, for she sees this movement as one that 'seems to constitute unity through/despite differences' (Maeckelbergh 2009:6). By adopting this approach, she rightly raises the issue of whether the actors and events that she describes in the study – that have generally been referred to as forming part of an anti-globalisation movement, if not *The* Anti-Globalisation Movement - can be termed a movement at all (hence often having been described as a 'movement of movements'). She notes 'a series of overlapping unities' including a 'unity constructed between movement actors around practices of decision-making', which she makes the focus of her study. Amongst the other unities that she perceives she notes (with reference to Klein) the 'reclaiming of the commons' (ibid).

In her exploration of the practices in the decision-making spaces of the alterglobalisation movement, Maeckelbergh speaks of pre-figuration, and the ambition considered important by many of the actors to create the world they envisage through the means whereby they go about trying to attain that end; a utopian situation of social justice then cannot be reached through a process that includes any hierarchical, closed, undemocratic decision-making, but can only be reached through participative, consensual practises. Furthermore, replacing old models of even having specific shared goals – the ends – articulated by a movement's leaders is the sense that no single definition of an ultimate goal is needed or even desirable; the means very much are the ends; each actor's voice creates the message. It is notable that the activists interviewed for this research (see chapter 6) each describe a very personal route into activism, and then into collective action, rather than (as might be the case with more traditional concepts and forms of radical political activism) through workplace organisation (either Trades Unions, party membership or identification with a particular class (working class/peasantry) or more recent forms of identity politics (gender/ethnicity/sexuality)). Reminding us of Walker's analysis, Carlsson

notes that through the work of these activists 'new practices are emerging that are redefining politics and opening spaces of unpredictability. Instead of traditional forms like unions and parties, people are coming together in practical projects' (Carlsson 2008: 3).

Similarly within our growing notions of the commons, a new model that changes the paradigms of how we understand relationships emerges. James Quilligan attempts to articulate this in an all-encompassing vision. For him, the commons can provide a new sense of value, one apart from market value, running through both material and immaterial areas, which provides us with a language through which we can talk about the managing of whole systems in ways that have not emerged in western philosophy for the last few centuries. This is also a way of valuing that requires for its appreciation a departure from the dualities of modern political life which include among other binaries values of scale and development (Walker 2005). In this value system process is as important if not more important than ends; and this process gives prime of place to cooperative approaches and working together at living, not especially at striving for decision; and to diversity. This finds expression in the commons and commons-based approaches.

Activism in Haringey

The multiplicity of community action groups that exists in the London Borough of Haringey provide an example of a diverse, de-centred but networked and often mutually sustaining form of grassroots activism. Haringey contains both the highest level of cultural diversity and the highest levels of socio-economic inequality in London. Given that the UK has the most unequal society of any European country, Haringey can be considered as a prime example of the increased levels of inequality prevalent and growing under neoliberalism. On the western side of Haringey are highly affluent areas such as Crouch End, Muswell Hill and Highgate. On the eastern side of the Borough are wards that are described as socio-economically deprived and where we find the most culturally diverse post-code in London, N17, part of Tottenham. Wood Green sits in the middle of the Borough and is to some extent a meeting point between the eastern and western extremes, though closer to the eastern

side in terms of its socio-economic and ethnic characteristics. Much of the activism described here takes place in Wood Green and Tottenham.

Activists in Haringey can be described as illustrating an emerging model of activism which calls for a new analysis of locally-based activism where a range of local people (with varying experiences of and expectations of activism) join together in some form in the locality, to work together to address a range of issues – both local and global – or even simply to create community, for the benefits and empowerment that come with this act. Consideration has been given above to the meaning of 'grassroots activism', allowing us to understand the breadth and diversity of what might be looked at under this term, and to ensure that it is considered as a form of social behaviour that we should not attempt to separate from or view in isolation from wider patterns of human and social interaction.

By also recognising the historic and international links of contemporary British activism, we have begun to explore what these links signify, how they might empower present day struggles, and what political picture emerges through this wider and deeper picture of protest and activism. An example of this from Tottenham is the Wards Corner Community Coalition's struggle to block the Council's plans for the 'regeneration' of an area of the borough through sale to private developers (discussed in the previous chapter, see p.84). This community group sought to have their own plans adopted instead and are an example of how communities attempt to preserve their commons, and how those involved revitalise democracy by their methods as well as their goals. A contemporary example of British protest thus links into both a historic tradition and an international context.

In Haringey we also find elements of the kind of associational activity described by Hemming (Hemming 2011) such as the knitting clubs and book clubs that take place in an independent bookshop in Wood Green. There is also much environmentally focused activity that looks much like this associational activity: small groups form, both temporary and long-term, for supporting the introduction of energy-saving practices at home, for learning to forage for wild foods, for making Christmas cards out of recycled materials. Such activities are interlinked with and provide a bed-rock for more overt forms of activism and protest. Affiliated to the Sustainable Haringey Network, for example, are members of these sorts of groups, and also members of national activist groups such as Climate Camp; and sometimes

these people are indeed the same people. We can see that some of the importance of 21st century activism is the act itself - which is political of itself - and the cultural transformation that participation brings about, for those involved and on the wider society.

The associations described by Hemming (ibid) are not primarily focused on making direct social or political changes, though some are, and arguably they all have a social as well as potentially a political impact. The first case study he reports on is F.C. United of Manchester, which has become a hugely successful football club originally established by a handful of ex-Manchester United fans who were dismayed when their club was sold off to foreign investors. He interviews members of book clubs, Druid orders and bird watching groups to mention just a few of an enormously long list. However, included in his list of such groups that have existed historically – and Britain has a long history of associations – are such activists as the Levellers, the Diggers, the Anti-Corn Law League, the Tolpuddle Martyrs, and the Suffragettes.

There is a tradition – and therefore much experience - of politicised activism in Haringey that has perhaps engendered, supported and helped to network a considerable range of small, grassroots activist groups, many of which in recent years have focused on issues of environmental, as well as social, justice. One example of this activism is the Haringey Solidarity Group which started as an Anti-Poll Tax group, but which decided to continue in order to:

> ...get rid of the current system which places profit and power before people's real needs. To do this, we believe we all need to get organised, fight back and take over the decision-making in communities and workplaces. We support and participate in local campaigns, spread ideas and help create effective opposition to the powers that be. (Haringey Solidarity Group 2012)

Their newsletter is entitled: 'Totally Independent' and proclaims itself to be 'Haringey's only independent news sheet.' Their website lists 27 other groups active in Haringey, some of which are local arms of national or regional organisations, while others are themselves umbrella organisations for smaller local groups – such as the Haringey Federation of Residents' Associations, which represents over 160 residents associations, Haringey Friends of Park Forum which represents around 30 groups, and Sustainable Haringey, which

networks and promotes activism for environmental sustainability throughout the Borough and to which a number of groups involved in such activities are affiliated.

Activism in Haringey also illustrates the development of the relationship between the local and the global that has been raised. Activists gather in part to address environmental issues that are global in their scope, but which are approached via local concerns and local solutions; global warming is tackled at a local level by networks of people who participate in a wide range of initiatives that include behaviour linked to the home, to transport, to food production etc. The following example taken from Haringey illustrates the link between associational activity and 'activism', and how the local is influenced by and in turn influences a global discourse. A local campaign successfully saved an old allotment site in Noel Park, the Victorian workers' estate in Wood Green where I live, from being sold off by the local council to developers; a group of neighbours from the community then worked alongside the council for the several years that it took to have the site cleared and restored to use. Finally the allotments were allocated, mostly to the dozen or so local residents who both campaigned and also optimistically put their names down on the waiting list many years previously. This campaign group turned into an allotment association of a very particular nature, characterised by a high level of cooperation and mutual support, where individuals with such personal resources as building skills and greater physical strength, offered up their help to others, and helped to establish the communal areas; the success of the allotment site as a whole became a shared goal, rather than the individual allotment holders competing for success with each other. A few of those involved with the allotments are also members of Sustainable Haringey. Through these connections, the very local activity is linked into broader Borough-wide activity. It is also part of a national surge in demand for allotments, and a plethora of groups and funding opportunities supporting community growing projects. It links into wider environmental concerns about the need for organically and locally grown food; it will also help to address the crisis in bee numbers by housing some bee hives, which are provided, with bee-keeping training, by a national charity. A consciousness of the need for communities to engage with the State - represented by the local council in this instance - and to defend themselves against the interests of private enterprise - in this case, the property developers - also lies in the roots of the identity of this allotment community.

On 8th February 2011, I attended a seminar at Birkbeck that was delivered as part of the Birkbeck Urban Studies Group Seminar by Denis Dillon entitled 'Neighbourhood Renewal and Community Capacity: The Experience of the London Borough of Haringey'. Dillon had completed a PhD based on research on the experience of New Labour initiatives in certain wards in the east of the Borough such as the New Deals for Communities (NDC) and the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy; he was also Haringey's lead councillor for regeneration at the time.

There were a number of other Haringey residents attending the seminar; Dillon had promoted his talk to a number of individuals in Haringey, and news of the event had been further spread through several activists' networks in Haringey. This created an interesting response to his talk: there were several rather more heated reactions to his talk than one might normally expect at an academic seminar. What I witnessed was an uncomfortable interface between academia and the ongoing realities of the subjects of the research. The study that Dillon conducted ended in 2006; when I spoke after the event to some of the people in the audience that I knew, they explained to me that after that time, certain of the NDC initiatives that Dillon had carried out his research on had taken a new direction, becoming, in their words, heavily monopolised by certain individuals working hand in glove with the Council, silencing any dissenting voices from the residents they should have been representing. The activists had been disempowered by those who undertook to 'represent' them in the interface with the council. The resultant anger among some residents made itself heard at Dillon's seminar. Although Dillon's study had ended in 2006, this was an irrelevance for the residents whose experiences had not stood still since that date.

In the representation given by Dillon of activism across Haringey as a whole, he noted that levels of activism were far higher in the wealthy wards in the west of the Borough than in the socio-economically deprived areas on the eastern side. This was backed up by his representation of the approach that underpinned New Labour's Third Way regeneration strategies, which was that the quality of services in socio-economically deprived areas could be driven up by raising levels of community engagement; that what was lacking was not the services themselves, but the community engagement with – and thereby influence over – the State and its local representation and the deliverers of its services, which was perceived to be

far higher in wealthier areas. Dillon noted that those residents who participated in the New Deal for Communities programmes were not representative of their wards, but had received higher levels of education, were more often in professional jobs and were more likely to have already had some experience of community activism than the ward's average. While the larger and more established ethnic groups of the wards were represented, many minority groups were not, including asylum seekers.

Dillon acknowledged that the socio-economically deprived communities were to a certain extent pathologised. It might be argued that it is those who are confident of their ability to influence who engage, while those who are more easily ignored, and who therefore have before them a harder fight to be heard, and for whom a positive outcome is less likely, engage less. This goes deep into our culture, as does the pathology of material poverty, and so the vicious circle of under-representation and deprivation continues. Through my job as a manager of the Student Exchange Programme at a London university, I am constantly reminded that employers are looking for people with languages and international experience. In a survey conducted by the CBI on graduate entrants, 70% of employers said that the graduates needed more languages, and 60% said they needed more international experience (CBI 2012). As previously noted, Haringey is the most culturally diverse part of a city which has been identified as the most culturally diverse city in Europe; in many schools in and around Haringey, English is a second language for over 50% of the pupils. This is only ever conceived of as a problem, educationally and socially, despite the fact that these young people are growing up multi-lingual and with life-experience of different cultures – the very things that, according to the CBI's survey, should be aiding them in their entry into the job market. What is needed is a pathology of our system of democracy, rather than pathology of the individual and communities whom it attempts to both represent and serve.

Dillon describes the presence of higher levels of autonomous activism in affluent areas as a historic trend, and ascribes the recently increasing levels of such activism in some central parts of the Borough – such as Hornsey and Noel Park – to a measure of gentrification. What this overlooks is the history of a more radical, politicised activism, which is more prevalent in the less affluent areas of the Borough, and which would not have been willing to align itself with a government initiative such as that being studied by Dillon. Much

of the activism at the grassroots level of communities in eastern Haringey effectively demonstrates faith in the capacity to remedy the shortfalls of the state through harnessing the involvement of local people.

The Occupy movement

> There is enormous synergy between the emergence of Occupy and the rise of the global movement to reclaim our commons. The commons has a long history as a way that people claimed, shared and protected the resources on which they depended. It is rising again at the intersection of direct democracy, equity, ecological responsibility and community. (Alexa Bradley speaking at OWS Forum on the Commons: Making Worlds, February 2012)

The Occupy movements that emerged around the globe in the second half of 2011, that began as a protest against Wall Street with Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in Zuccotti Park on 17th September 2011 and numbered nearly three thousand by the end of the year, seized the imagination and voiced the concerns of a far wider sector of society than might have been anticipated, or at least than was anticipated by politicians and mainstream media. Just as the establishment was taken by surprise by the British student protests of late 2010, it was taken by surprise by the levels of support that the Occupy movement received from the public. To the surprise of politicians, and to the Church of England's hierarchy, the messages of the Occupy London Stock Exchange (OLSX) resonated among a wide audience. As has been discussed in chapter one, it has served the status quo of neoliberalism, in its pursuit of unfettered growth and profit, to sustain an image of a broken society in which nobody cares about anybody else, a society utterly lacking in community spirit and care. And yet, commentators have lamented the grip on society of these very attitudes that are required to do business the neoliberal way – extreme individualism, breakdown of community and a flight of compassion within society – while at the same time shrugging off the humanitarian and environmental concerns voiced by a persistent and vocal minority as the discourse of a naive and deluded group at the fringes of society. Some may have been less surprised to hear so many people expressing their support for the Occupy movements and their

messages. At the outset of this research, the Occupy movement had not happened; nor had the student protests in Britain of late 2010, or the encampments and demonstrations of the Spanish 'indignados', or the so-called Arab Spring. However, as has been argued, the activism that is the focus of this thesis is a significant part of what prepared the way to these events, this explosion of political activism. These incidents may manifest suddenly but they are built on and enabled by the development of resilience and initiative through years of activity at the grassroots. This research has identified a multitude of actors who have been working across the world to bring about greater social and environmental justice through their own actions, groups endeavouring to reinvent social and economic relationships, citizens and protestors prefiguring new politics, carving out new stories, finding new languages.

The establishment of the London Occupy camp outside a place of Christian worship introduced an interesting and surprising debate about morals. The location of the camp outside St Paul's Cathedral was merely coincidental; it was only circumstance - the protestors' failure to establish a camp in their first choice of location outside the London Stock Exchange, and the availability of another open publicly accessible area outside the cathedral - that brought them there. Much was made of the symbolism of this juxtaposition at first, peppered with biblical references to the stories of the New Testament which recount Jesus chasing the money-lenders out of the temple. In an article for Red Pepper posted in January 2012, Mark Barrett and Ginger Haag 'explore how the Occupy movement has re-opened a debate within the church on the gap between markets and morals' (Barrett and Haag 2012). Referring to the money-lenders, they note a placard of one Occupy protestor that read: 'What would Jesus do?' to which they suggest the answer was illustrated by 'another St Paul's placard, carried by a man dressed as Jesus "I threw out the money-lenders for a reason"' (ibid). As Cameron had recently made a speech to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, Barrett and Haag were also able to note and expand on 'a dissonant note associated with a politician – the politician - lecturing the masses on returning to Christian morals' (ibid).

The predictable media attacks on the moral fibre (and hygiene standards) of those participating in the camps notably failed to stick. The clergy of St Pauls, representing the hierarchy of the Church of England, handled the public relations of the situation badly and

dug themselves into a hole, appearing to side with the establishment against the protestors who were effortlessly winning the moral high ground. One explanation for the ease with which Occupy won the moral high ground is perhaps that the protestors represented something entirely new, in that they were able to express a morality of the kind that has been largely absent in the public sphere for a considerable time. The very idea of morality has tended to represent something either odious or old fashioned, for the people who will declare publicly that their actions are guided by morals have tended to be within a reactionary and right-wing religious faction, particularly vocal in the US on issues such as anti-gay and anti-abortion rights; in a secular age, religion has been for fanatics or fuddy duddies. Meanwhile voices raising social concerns about issues such as human rights for any group readily demonised by the press (terrorist detainees, benefit claimants, UK rioters in 2011) have been dubbed as weak-livered liberals. In the relativism of these post-modern times, morality looked like a relic from the past. Occupy was able to embody a new expression of morality, that can express concern about the behaviour of the elite without becoming fundamentalist.

There has been some growth around the edges – Corporate Social Responsibility for example – and we have seen some tempering of the neoliberal policies and some growth of the 'human' agenda in the UN discourse for example in the World Development Reports, but that has felt somehow quite technical and has been accompanied by much cynicism as to the limited effects of such measures. In the post-modern age of the destruction of the castle of modern certainties (Esteva and Prakash 1998), an age that has also been anti-intellectual as well as profoundly anti-religious (the latter in the West at least), people have found it hard to articulate big ideas. Occupy seemed to fill this void – perhaps temporarily, and it is too soon to know what the lasting legacy will be – and provided a platform and an agenda of sorts. Occupy found a wide-based support by expressing a concern that business should not conduct itself at anyone's expense - that both people (workers, usually abroad, so international solidarity implied) and the planet (natural resources, again a trans-national issue) should be respected. In other ways too, Occupy's message is that what matters are people – the 99%. The Occupy movement has embodied the message that the concerns of the majority should be reflected in the way the world does business; this is a reclaiming of

political space, a demand for voice and influence over decision making, a demand for an access to power to equal that of corporate lobbyists and financiers. OWS was addressing the imbalance of power that has resulted from the alliance between governments and global business interests: 'It really is Wallstreegov.com, and given the interconnected nature of the global economy, it is a form of governance that exercises control beyond that of national governments' (Wight 2012:162).

While the rioters of August 2011 were accused of a total lack of moral codes and their families and communities proclaimed to be in crisis, the Occupy movements levelled the same accusations at the state and the market. As the description of a conference stream entitled 'Common Life: Critical Perspectives on Authority, Experience and Community', part of the London Conference in Critical Thought 2012, put it, the debates about the riots 'centred on an alleged 'crisis of community' defined by a 'lack of authority'- a lack of values, meaning and moral leadership within communities'. As Wight put it, comparing the morals of some of the '1%' who benefitted from huge bonuses even after playing a part in the financial crisis with the rioters:

> Yes, of course, in a system that makes possible, even encourages, such greed, why wouldn't one take advantage? But that surely applies to riots as well. If the message that is being sent is 'when you can take advantage, do so!' then one can hardly blame the looters in London for acquiring a new plasma TV if the opportunity arises. (Op cit: 164)

 The Occupy movement has widely broadcasted what has come to look like a massive case of projection regarding moral behaviour. For the Occupy movement has brought to the top of the agenda the wish of citizens to develop an economic system that does less harm. It asks for a system that embodies social and environmental justice, a system that works OK for everyone, for the 99%.

Arguably neoliberalism was being kicked once it was already down. The fact that its downfall – in the sense of the effects of the fall of Lehman Brothers and the subprime mortgage crisis – was caused by the actions of financiers who found easy ways to make profit at the expense of safeguarding the financial security of their clients whose mortgages,

pensions and life savings they were responsible for, an action nurtured by policies of deregulation, however, points to the underlying tendencies of neoliberalism. Ethical considerations are left aside. The support for Occupy has also shown that a lot of people care if their own material needs are met at the expense of others. Many people didn't know that the corporation responsible for selling them their favourite trainers, for example, was not concerned about the social and environmental costs of the production of those trainers. Nike, in fact, does not produce trainers: it produces and sells the idea of the trainer (Klein 2001). It could thus deny any responsibility for the working practises of those companies who produced the goods for them, leaving these issues to be decided by the supposed 'free market'.

The first riot in Tottenham was sparked by a specific, local case of injustice: a man was shot dead by police (see chapter 4, p.80). The man was of Afro-Caribbean descent, and from a neighbourhood where the relationship between the black community and the police was already strained. Rather than displaying a lack of community cohesion, Tottenham showed the opposite: many rallied round the dead man's family and showed their support by walking with them to the police station with an appeal that the police talk to them. Nor does this event occur in isolation. As reported to the audience at the Bernie Grant's Arts Centre by Stafford Scott, the community activist given a voice in Slovo's play (see chapter 4, p. 83), much community work had been put into improving relationships with the police following the fatal stabbing of a policeman during the Broadwater Farm riots in 1985; recently, however, the police had removed the superintendent with whom local community leaders had forged strong relationships on the grounds that they had become too close, too friendly.

The riots reflect back to us the lack of moral or ethical consideration that characterises the system – an economic one, supported by a political one through the military-industrial complex – that puts those trainers and mobile phones onto our high streets. The reaction of the status quo was to express dismay and abhorrence for the moral deficiency of the looters. This is part of a common pattern of problematisation of poverty referred to above, in which the notion of the inherent fecklessness of the poor (a term used by former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey in January 2011 when defending the government's move to cap benefits) is used as a serious topic of debate. The looters were

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accused of lacking any ethical or moral code that might teach them the value of work and of 'earning' access to these goods. At the same time, the huge bonuses earned by bankers, and the tax evasion commonly practised by corporate chiefs and other high earners are justified by some, though are seen as increasingly contentious and the object of protests by others, such as the activist group UKuncut. What do they tell us about the value of work and the ethics of earning? Are we to laude the hardworking ethos of those working in the harsh conditions, for example, of the 'free economic zones', on the production lines of many of these goods? No. Instead, we are quite specifically invited to applaud the wealth and fame of successful high-earners, whether these are from the world of business, sports or music; the role models of a celebrity culture.

On 10th December 2011, I attended a talk at Occupy's Bank of Ideas, situated in an abandoned office block on Sun Street, Hackney, owned by the bank UBS. In what they called a 'public repossession', activists from Occupy London took over the empty building in November 2011. Interviewed by Channel 4 News, some of the activists involved justified this occupation through a comparison of the plight of families losing their homes for failing to keep up with mortgage payment – and the loss of social spaces such as nurseries, community centres and youth clubs – with the fortune of the bailed-out banks who caused the crash of the global economy and who sit on empty premises. Referring to this occupation as a 'repossession' highlights the sense that physical space – always at a premium in the city, and symbolically representing space in the non-physical dimension of politics – should rightly belong to the community for the function of meeting real social needs, rather than to businesses, who can become the legal owners by paying for ownership of physical spaces, and who have access to influence politicians and therefore policy making, sometimes by virtue of cash payments.

It has been hard to articulate a morality that could be seen as inclusive, contemporarily relevant, radical instead of reactionary, and that dared make great, wide, deep statements about what might really matter. Occupy filled a vacuum, and initiated a wave of discourse about occupying and reclaiming which continues to emerge in new contexts. Occupy has also brought together people from a wide political spectrum. The leaders of the School of Commoning, a London-based group that aims to educate people

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about the commons, set up an Occupy-Commons strategy workshop, with the title 'Reclaiming the Commons as a Social Theory of Collective Action' as part of 'Making Worlds', an OWS Forum on the Commons held from 16th-18th February, 2012. In a website aimed at extending the two-day workshop to a ten-day online workshop, the facilitators referred to Gramsci's 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci 1979) , and an article by Jay Walljasper's called '12 Reasons You'll Be Hearing More About the Commons in 2012' (originally posted in On the Commons, see chapter 2, p.25) – an interesting juxtaposition of itself. Meanwhile, participating in the Forum among others were: Federici, Caffentzis, Bollier and Quilligan, all of whom have been referred to in earlier chapters. This OWS Forum was a melting pot for many of the ideas about the commons referred to in this study from capitalist reformers and Marxist theorists, a theme that will be taken up in chapter seven. The occurrence of such a Forum as part of OWS in itself highlights the important role of grassroots activists in the development of a commons discourse that has been one of the topics of this research.

The impact of the Occupy movement has manifested in many spheres, including academia. On 16th October 2011, an email was sent by Nicholas Kiersey (Assistant Professor in Political Science at Ohio University) to a number of scholars of International Relations and International Political Economy scholars calling for expressions of interest in starting a conversation in response to and in support of the Occupy movements. His email was a call to support the Occupy movements – which at the time were rapidly unfolding in cities across the globe – with reflection and exploration of the movements, their effects on the discipline of International Relations, and the relationship between the academic field and the world of political activism. Kiersey opened a blog and a Facebook page: '#occupyirtheory/ipe'. Contributors to the discussion group then hosted an event at the 2012 International Studies Association annual convention in San Diego. Initiated by the same group, the Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies produced an issue which included fifteen contributions under the heading *Occupy IR/IPE: A symposium on the global occupy movement* (Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies, Issue 5). As Kiersey noted in his initial email and also wrote in an article in the above publication:

> In becoming career academics, we had all been guided by the hope that we were doing something good for the world. As we quickly learned, however,

this was not an easy or straightforward proposition – academia has its way of letting us know what sort of things we can and can't do if we want to be secure in our positions. (Kiersey 2012 (i):104).

Kiersey and other contributors articulate both the ambitions and the restraints that were discussed in chapter one of this work. As another participant in the conversations and contributor to the publication noted 'we are now acting like temporarily embarrassed intellectuals trying to do something of a 'reality check' about what it is that #occupy can teach us about our work and our impact in the world' (Vrasti 2012: 121).

Dark Mountain Festival

In August 2011, a project called Dark Mountain put on an event that was a crossover between festival and conference called Uncivilisation over a weekend at The Sustainability Centre in Hampshire. Interspersed with opportunities to participate in outdoor activities such as foraging, scything and building a lo-tech, cheap and easily constructed emergency shelter, and with workshops where people could explore different ways of perceiving the world by reconnecting with the body, the sacred and with inner innate knowledge through exercises, poetry or story-telling, were a number of presentations and discussions around subjects including the Luddites and the future of universities. Dark Mountain created the space not just for the intellectual searches for ways of dealing with and finding solutions to the crises of our time, but for a different kind of learning and focus to support that process; the festival held open a variety of lines of enquiry, and the festival-goers/conference attendees/activists were invited to participate in events such as a feral choir and an improvisational theatre 'playshop' alongside discussions about possible futures for the world's economic, environmental, political, social and educational systems.

The Dark Mountain project – which includes the publication of several anthologies – describes itself on its website as 'a growing global movement of writers, artists, craftspeople and workers with practical skills who have stopped believing in the stories our civilisation tells itself…. We are not an 'activist' movement seeking new ways to 'save the world'… We

aim to question the stories that underpin our failing civilisation, to craft new ones for the age ahead (Dark Mountain 2011).

What brought about the Dark Mountain project - and what brought a wider group of people to this festival - was this desire to face up to the crises perceived to be characterising human and environmental life in the present day (represented by the 'dark mountain'), and to explore alternatives, discover new possible futures; to find new stories to replace the old broken ones. Dark Mountain disclaims being an 'activist' movement and those who participated – including the organisers, the invited speakers, and those running workshops as well as those who attended by virtue of purchasing an entry ticket – defy categorisation as activists. Reminding us of Esteva (see chapter 3), the Dark Mountain project seeks to break away from old stories in order to find new ones, and it accepts that all human faculties and capacities may contribute to this rewriting of our story, with an equal place given to intellectual, practical and existential skills and development. On the agenda for discussion were, among other things, experiments with radical ways of providing education. This discussion about the future of universities not only revealed (by means of a show of hands at a well-attended meeting) that a sizeable proportion of the festival attendees were involved in work at universities, but also brought home a further relevance of this project to this thesis through the connection with the attention given in this essay's methodology to the need to break away from the limitations of traditional academia in order to encourage the finding and telling of new stories.

Ned Ludd and Simon Fairlie

Among the other events at the Dark Mountain was a workshop about the Luddites who – like the Levellers and Diggers and others before them – were part of the historic power struggle of workers to defend themselves against the encroachment of systems that deprived them of subsistence rights, of access to land, and to power over their own production. The Luddite weavers were not against the development of machinery per se which they famously vandalised, but opposed the system that came with the introduction of

the new machinery that attempted to tie weavers into waged labour, rather than allowing them to continue to work as independent yeoman, and that 'caused great distress in the north, bringing about mass unemployment and worsening conditions even for those still working' (Hampton 1984: 390). English history is populated by radical struggle and resistance, and protests which periodically brought this resistance to the surface, often to be violently repressed.

During the discussion on the Luddites at the *Uncivilisation* event, comparisons were drawn between Ned Ludd, probably a fictional character, and Subcomandante Marcos, spokesperson for the Zapatistas. After events when machines were attacked, it was common to say that 'Ned Ludd did it', making Ned (or King) Ludd into an everyman and no-man; and as Subcomandante Marcos has said, the Zapatistas are everyone, everyone is a Zapatista (Ponce de Leon 2001).

Simon Fairlie was one of those present at the gathering. Fairlie, as referred to in chapter three, was co-author of *Whose Common Future? Reclaiming the Commons* (1993) and co-presenter of a paper of the same name at the PSA conference 1995. *The Land* Magazine, of which he is currently editor, had focused its latest edition (Issue 10, summer 2011) on the Luddites in honour of the bicentenary of Luddism. Simon spoke to me of the work he is currently engaged in, the effects of the selling off of the English woodlands. In some cases, new owners of plots of woodland have grouped together and appointed one of the owners to act as a (paid) manager for all their sites; and the land rights campaign project *This Land is Ours (TLIO)* which he works with, have, among other things, responded to the government's forests' panel's consultation on the future of woodland. His presence at this event provided a concrete link between the events at the festival and the text I reviewed as the starting point of the literature review (The Ecologist 1993).

The Zapatistas

The Zapatistas have inspired a large number of activists and writers, and a study of the commons would be incomplete without a mention of them, for their actions and their

discourse, which have reverberated around the world, were a quintessential expression of an action of reclaiming of autonomy, and so are close to the themes of this essay. To attempt to add to the wealth of commentary on the Zapatistas would be beyond the scope of this study. Here, I summarise key points which indicate the contribution the Zapatista movement has made, intellectually and politically, on subsequent activisms and on the importance of the idea of the commons to Zapatista activists.

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) formed in 1983 and began their action on 1st January 1994 (the date of the imposition of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement), entering a number of towns in the Mexican region of Chiapas and releasing their message to the world through the First Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle (Zapatista Army of National Liberation 1993). The Zapatistas action was an attempt to reclaim their own material and cultural existence, grounded in their own locality, in a very real and immediate way, while the symbolism of the date they chose linked this action to national governmental policy and international trade policies, highlighting the effects of national and international trade policies on their lives. By making this symbolic link, and also through the contents of their Declaration, they reminded the world that their actions were called for because of the pernicious impact on their lives of the decisions taken by powers over the previous five hundred years.

The Declaration draws attention to Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution: 'National Sovereignty essentially and originally resides in the people. All political power emanates from the people and its purpose is to help the people. The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government.' They call for 'other powers of the nation advocate to restore the legitimacy and the stability of the nation by overthrowing the dictator', ask for the International Red Cross to 'watch over and regulate our battles', and declare themselves to be subject to the Geneva Accord (EZLN op cit). They thus declare their legitimacy in both a national and international legal framework.

The armed clashes with the Mexican army were short lived, but the resistance of the Zapatistas continued by non-violent means and remained strong despite aggressive tactics by the state, and the influence of their actions and their message reached out nationally and internationally. This was partly through the extraordinary discourse that emerged from the

Zapatistas through their spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos. Since the first Declaration, nine more have followed, the most recent at time of writing being in June 2010. Drawing comparisons and contrasts between Che Guevara and Subcomandante Marco, Rubin notes that

> ...the extraordinarily complex and rich history of political discussion and organizing in Chiapas from the 1970s to the 1990s produced something genuinely original, a new leftist language and vision. This includes negotiation about what it means to be Indian within a larger Mexican nation. It includes discussion about new forms of democracy and an inventiveness regarding civil society... (Rubin 2002)

Many have referred to the Zapatistas as being a catalyst for the contemporary wave of activism and academic thought that is currently grouping itself around concepts of the commons. In a symbolic way, this can certainly be argued - their story is repeated around the world – and their actions, and the words of the Subcomandante Marcos, seem to have struck a chord that has resonated across the world. Three of the texts explored in the literature review (Esteva and Prakash 1998; Linebaugh 2006; Caffentzis 2010) make reference to the Zapatistas. As referred to earlier, in an analysis of the contemporary international global justice movement, Klein notes that while many commentators have given the demonstrations at the WTO summit in Seattle 1999 as the birth of this 'movement', many others name the Zapatista uprising as its birth (Klein 2001). The Zapatistas are referred to in both the introduction and the conclusion of Linebaugh's exploration of the Charters of Liberty, the key link to this study being the legal or constitutional fate of the commons. He notes in his introduction that 'the *ejido,* or village commons, was destroyed, and its legal protection, Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, repealed' (Linebaugh 2008:2). He notes in his conclusion that 'not until the 1990s and the movement to reclaim the commons has the issue (of legal or constitutional fate of the commons) returned, thanks to the struggles of the indigenous people of America, and thanks to the Zapatistas' (op cit: 273).

There is little doubt that the actions and the words of the Zapatistas have been an inspiration and a catalyst, somehow igniting a reaction across the world in an extraordinary way. Now, nearly eighteen years after the start, and following the extent of their impact across the world, it might be easy to take for granted their influence on a discourse that

reaches across the globe and forget how exceptional it was that this event involving a relatively small group of people rapidly became a big event in world history and had such an ongoing impact. As Esteva and Prakash ask: 'how are we to explain the fact that people in more than a hundred countries reacted to the Zapatistas' liberation initiatives with meetings, encounters, mobilisations and thousands of specific proposals?' (Esteva and Prakash 1998: 6). They also ask: 'How are we to explain the independent initiatives that started disseminating daily news and comments about the Zapatistas through three electronic networks only a few weeks after January 1st, 1994?' (op cit 6-7); and how to explain the books that were being published a few months later in at least five languages and ten countries; or 'the reaction in five continents to their invitation to animate the "international" of hope, overcoming the oppression of global neoliberalism?' (ibid). Clearly, the story that they told and lived out resonated widely with people all over the world; it was a story that had been forged through five hundred years of a history that was not theirs uniquely, but that had been experienced by people in other countries and continents too. Though the specifics are unique to their locality, there is enough of a common experience to allow their message to speak out beyond regional and national borders.

Pirate programmers, outlaw bicyclists, and vacant-lot gardeners

While there has been much commentary on the so-called 'anti-globalisation', 'global justice' or 'alter-globalisation' movement, less has been said about the more invisible work being done at the grassroots, often but not exclusively in urban settings in western countries. We have examined the case of Haringey, and now turn to the US. Chris Carlsson describes these phenomena that he sees taking place in his home-town of San Francisco, in his book entitled *Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists, and Vacant-Lot Gardeners Are Inventing The Future Today!* (Carlsson 2008). Carlsson's protagonists are not called activists; he introduces them instead as 'tinkerers, inventors, and improvisational spirits'; words like 'radical', 'subculture' and 'revolution' characterise their activities. What he describes is similar to the associational behaviour identified by Hemming, but always based

around activities that are specifically motivated by - and create further spaces for - the kinds of environmental and social consciousness that capitalism affords little space to. Activities include bike repair shops and classes as well as other activities and lobby groups around bikes (Carlsson was himself the founder of the Critical Mass bicycle rides, that now take place across the world); IT work and resources provided to activist groups; early experimentation on powering engines with waste vegetable fat; urban horticulture, community gardens and support systems for small local farmers.

Illustrating again Walker's point (Walker 2005), Carlsson notes that while participants do not generally see their activities as political, they are, and profoundly so; he describes in their activities a *work* activity which represents an 'exodus from capitalist society', a radical impulse that follows on from the radical workers' movements of the past two centuries which have been firmly placed *in* the capitalist work-place (Carlsson 2008: 4). He sees in the activities that he explores in his book 'an important thread of self-emancipatory class politics beyond the traditional arena of wage-labour' (op cit: 3). The context against which these activities take place is that 'capitalism continues its inexorable push to corral every square inch of the globe into its logic of money and markets, while simultaneously seeking to colonize our very thoughts and control our desires and behaviour' (ibid). The language that Carlsson uses is of enclosure and commons, and casts these activists in the light of a 21st century Marxian power struggle of the workers.

A 'Commons Movement'?

Jay Walljasper, in his book *All That We Share: A Field Guide to the Commons* (Walljasper 2010), places contemporary activisms firmly within a capitalist context. Walljasper is also fellow and editor of *On the Commons*, an organisation which describes itself on its webpage as one that has '...sparked collaborations, showcased commons-based solutions at the community and national level, developed approaches of how to share our commons equitably and given inspiration to commons activists to make a difference in their communities — and the world' (On the Commons 2010). Interviewed on a radio show in the

US, Walljasper described the commons movement as a paradigm change; a different way to look at the world; he noted that the way to start is by seeing and naming the commons, claiming the commons, then doing, creating the commons — becoming Commoners. He refers in his book to Linebaugh as having coined the word 'commoning', noting that 'the commons is an activity rather than just a material resource', thus highlighting the social element of the commons (Linebaugh 2008 cited in Walljasper 2010:4).

For Walljasper, commons are assets that cannot or should not be privately owned: water, the judicial system and the internet, for example; the new meaning ascribed to an old word, the commons, is 'what we share'. Walljasper describes the 'assault' that the market economy has delivered to the commons in recent years, and quotes a few examples: the profit made through health care by drug companies with 'exclusive rights to sell pharmaceuticals developed with public money'; and the copyrighting of certain yoga positions by Bikram Choudhury who 'now threatens other yoga studios teaching these techniques with lawsuits' (despite the fact that yoga is a practise that has evolved over centuries, and the poses and sequences that Choudhury copyrighted have long been in use) (op cit: 3). Walljasper's concept of a commons is one that co-exists within the capitalist market-economy: Walljasper's commons are capitalist commons, and his approach to capitalism is a reformative one.

> A commons-based society would place as much emphasis on social justice, democratic participation and environmental protection as on economic competitiveness and private property. Market-based solutions would be valuable tools in a commons-based society, as long as they do not undermine the workings of the commons itself. (Op cit: 5)

It is no surprise then that among Walljasper's sources are Bollier and Barnes, both theorists of the capitalist commons.

What Carlsson showed is that while activists could be described as creating anti-capitalist commons, many of these activists are involved in day-jobs that have them firmly within the capitalist system. In practice, then, the distinction between anti-capitalist commons and capitalist commons is hard to make; or at least, in the material lives of

communities, the two become merged. While the lives of a very few activists – or moments of their lives – are spent attempting to disassociate as far as possible from the capitalist system, most peoples' lives are very bound in to the capitalist system, so their acts of commoning take place in that context, even while these acts are contributing to the creation of something different and other. Does this mean that their commoning, and the commons they create, are supporting the continued existence of the capitalist market? This dilemma is examined further in the final two chapters.

In this chapter I have examined a range of examples of grassroots activism and other behaviour as part of civil society, from my own locality of Haringey, via a brief visit of a historic British example, and across the Atlantic to contemporary movements in South and North America. There are numbers of other activists, groups and networks that have inspired and informed this thesis, too numerous by far to all receive a mention, in whose actions we can identify a resistance to the enclosure of privatisation and a struggle for a deepening of democracy. As Time magazine noted regarding the influence of Ostrom's work: 'Virtually all the world's most urgent problems require collective action' (Johnson 2012). The ability to act collectively requires a lot of work at the global level, and there is a case for describing what is happening at the grassroots as a collective attempt to recover and practise this ability, not under an ideological banner, but in a way that can be described as a kind of mass protest and a communal attempt to regain some measure of voice and influence – or agency. The majority of the activists interviewed for this research talked about the importance of collective action, as well as empowerment, as the next chapter will show.

Chapter 6

Case Study: Interviews with Activists

I organise Seed Swap every year - giving people a chance to get together for a sociable start to the gardening year...and swapping seeds...so taking the garden seeds out of the commercial marketing arena of something that people sell to you, that you buy out of the catalogue, and turning them into a shared resource, a commons, that people can grow for themselves, save for themselves, pass around. (Judith)

Real politics is what people do collectively to take responsibility for their lives and their neighbourhoods and their services or whatever... and it's also trying to encourage people to see that they are the really important people and this kind of activity is the most important activity in our society.... in fact it's a counter-power to the structures of power and decision-making that are causing the problems that we are having to try and address. (Dave)

Seven interviews were conducted for the purposes of this research. This chapter opens with a methodology of these interviews, followed by a synthesis of the interviews in which the emerging themes are drawn out for analysis. A brief summary of each interview is provided in which a number of these themes are expanded. The connections between what the activists say and the argument of the thesis are summarised in the conclusion.

The interest of the interviews was to be the language used and the ideas expressed which called for in-depth semi-structured interviews with people I knew to be relevant and available; I have not set out to offer a quantitative analysis of a representative sample. There is an almost even gender divide among the interviewees (four male, three female) and they range in age from some in their twenties to some in their sixties. Though I did not ask them to tell me their ages, they fell quite clearly into two distinct age brackets, that I will simply call 'younger' (under 35 approximately) and 'older' (over 50 approximately). Four fell into the 'younger' bracket and three into the 'older' bracket.

Six of the interviewees were people that I was already acquainted with, while one I approached following a recommendation. I selected for interview activists who were involved in a range of different activities and so who would provide representative voices expressing a variety of concerns and approaches. All the interviewees are based in the south of England: five are in London, one in Bristol and one in rural Oxfordshire. Of the five from

London, three are directly involved with Sustainable Haringey, the network of activists discussed in chapter five; a fourth lives in Haringey and is networked to some of the activist groups in Haringey; and one is from south London. Though the geographic reach is relatively small, the selected activists have various backgrounds and are involved in a range of different activities, both individually and among the group. Despite their different experiences there is nonetheless significant convergence in the values and aims that they express.

Though I approached the interviews with six key questions that would provide an outline – and which I sent to the interviewees in advance – I found it more conducive simply to allow the interviewees to talk freely. I referred to the questions at points when the flow paused, or to ensure that these critical points were addressed if they had not arisen naturally during the course of the interview. This left space for things to arise which I had not anticipated, and allowed a very personal picture to be formed through each interview.

From the personal stories of how each interviewee first got involved in activism, and the individual responses to what activism means to each of them, several common themes emerge. These included 'doing the right thing'; bringing about change; justice and fairness; solidarity; the environment; agency and empowerment; and restoring a sense of community and a practice of collectivism. All were able to relate to the notion of the commons.

The responses to the specific question 'what is grassroots activism', as well as what is expressed throughout the interviews more generally, provide us with a sample of perspectives about the aims of activism, and approaches to defining activism, which showed remarkable similarities. Asked to describe what they see as activism, they all do so in a very broad way, along the lines of getting involved and taking action, together with other people, to try and bring about change. When Miriam says 'it's a way of seeing the world and a way of living your life' she articulates something that comes across from each of the interviewees, as does Pamela when she describes activism as 'anything one can do however small…you just have to do it'. For all the interviewees, a sense of community is important to their activism, often as context, inspiration and goal combined.   I will return to a full analysis of these and other themes that emerged after a short analysis of each of the interviews.

The interviews

Danny was one of the three 'younger' activists I interviewed. He identifies the development of his activist outlook as having started in his early childhood, linked to a strong sense of connection with the natural world. 'I've been an activist since I was about…maybe five or six…I can remember from a very early age having a very strong connection with the natural world and an affinity to other creatures'. He describes how he has been influenced by people and events in his immediate surroundings, both as a child and an adult. He talks about the people with whom we works or has worked as being his greatest influence and inspiration. He loves working on projects with people, 'because what happens is you actually work in community with each other, you work with these processes of consensus decision making and non-hierarchy…and using only reclaimed and natural materials and going the extra mile to make sure you are doing things the way that they should be done'.

Danny's current work in educational theatre puts him at the 'creative' end of what he identifies as a 'spectrum' of activism, noting as he says this: 'You know I think all forms of activism are kind of like not to be... discounted but kind of recognised as…needing to coexist and to...you know, they are part of a spectrum, and you need the whole spectrum in order to be able to actually bring about change'. For Danny, 'an activist is somebody who is prepared to take action on issues that they care about…it's just as simple as that'. Earlier, while at university he 'started to go into more sort of direct action…more risky stuff' and gave accounts of Climate Camp and the Copenhagen Climate Conference 2009 (COP15) that pointed to these experiences as having been inspiring and formative. At COP15 – which he was able to attend thanks to raising funds through 'pledge bank', which allowed 77 people to help fund him to go and whom he would represent – he received training in how to deal with the police, he learnt to make double-bicycles, and he was saved by the Rebel Clown Army. At the People's Assembly in Copenhagen 'I made a pledge - to go back into my community and to keep taking action - and I still live by that pledge'.

In a similar vein to Danny's early childhood experiences, Miriam (another of the 'younger' interviewees) recounts 'being very reverently attached to nature….from a very

young age…I can remember being just essentially worshipping nature just going out and being very grateful and very overwhelmed…kind of having sort of semi-spiritual experiences when I was quite young'. Like Danny, Miriam was brought up in the countryside and describes her parents as 'ecological'. Her father became an 'activist farmer' when being an organic farmer became difficult in the face of increasing governmental regulation and EU legislation. In particular she remembers the campaign against the attempt to ban unpasteurised milk which her father led. Talking about her entry into activism, she says she was 'always into it, went with him to demonstrations, so I guess it was just around me when I was young'. She recalls her own first piece of direct action which took place when she was at primary school: following on from a school project which looked at how much energy was consumed by home appliances, she hid her family's electric kettle and toaster insisting that they use their Aga stove instead. She identifies herself clearly as an activist; activism is 'a way of looking at the world and a way of living your life and…a way of orienting yourself towards change'. She is pleased that her activism covers local, national and global issues – 'the whole spectrum' - and enjoys the 'cross-fertilisation' that this brings.

After childhood, her activism continued to evolve at university where she formed an environmental society 'because it seemed the natural thing to do'. She describes a journey – 'I guess it was my activist learning' – from what she identifies as a reformist approach to a much more radical approach, moving through the frustration of fruitless negotiating to doing occupations. At the same time she was getting involved in wider campaigns – blockades against a nuclear weapon base, and climate change and anti-war demonstrations. When she left university she went to Iceland, to live at a protest camp in the wilderness where a hydro-dam was under construction by a major aluminium company. Here again she was very touched by the contact with nature, describing living in the wilderness again as a 'semi-spiritual experience'. She also describes herself as becoming further radicalised through the experience of the camp and the activists she met there. However after several years she became disillusioned, disliking what she felt was a 'cliquiness' and young people getting involved out of 'a desire to be cool' and became more interested in working with local communities.

At the same time she had come to recognise the bigger, global picture of the metal

industries, connecting the production of aluminium with the mining of raw materials in the global South, and linking these back to the financing in the City of London: Graeber's 'financial overlords' (see chapter 5, p.90). Working with an activist from India with a socialist Ghanian background who came to London on the trail of the mining company Vedanta, which had threatened the area in which he lived, she co-founded a group called Foil Vedanta which is now her 'main campaign'. She describes this as 'a London solidarity group addressing this company Vedanta wherever it operates.....linked very closely with all the grassroots movements' mostly in India but also in Zambia and involving activists from many continents. These activists came to Foil Vedanta 'not because Vedanta is the most important… but because it espouses a really brilliant politics, really brilliant research, and asks a lot of questions and goes deeper particularly into the financial background than a lot of other organisations do'.

Judith has been involved in activism and environmentalism through professional roles as well as at a grassroots community level. She came to the UK from Australia after completing a degree in social anthropology and worked in the 1980s for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. She has recently retired from Natural England where she worked as principal social research specialist. In between, among other jobs, she worked for the New Economics Foundation and the National Centre for Volunteering. Alongside this she has been involved with 'community environmental action' particularly in the Tottenham area where she lives and to some extent Haringey. At other times she has also been involved nationally and internationally – she mentions the Pedestrians Association and London21 among others - but more recently her focus has been local.

As with all the activists I interviewed, Judith's activism arises out of a sense of concern for the world around her, and is about trying to find ways to address these concerns: 'seeing something and thinking that's not right and trying to do something about changing it, about getting it to work properly - that's important - and of course doing it with others adds to the effectiveness'. Judith talks about a wide range of social, economic, political and environmental issues which reveal an informed and concerned perspective in which her activism is deeply imbedded. Whereas the conversation with the other interviewees tended

to flow from descriptions of and reflections on different moments or experiences of activism – with occasional pauses to explore wider issues in more depth - the conversation with Judith was issue-based, and peppered with examples taken from her experiences both at work and as a grassroots activist throughout her life.

She bemoans the level of public discourse and the 'tv-watching, money-earning, money-spending cocoon' that people do not want to break out from – though she says that 'it would be nice to be wrong about that'. She notes the need 'to convert the Jeremy Clarksons and the Top Gear watchers' and that 'many well-meaning activists lose people because of being po-faced and worthy'. She wonders what would be the most effective way of raising a challenge to the system – a system she describes as one of money and private property where money takes all.

Dave 'first became aware of the potential to change the world as a late teenager'; the first Glastonbury festival was particularly exciting and 'convinced me the world could be changed'. In the mid-seventies he worked as a postman and was branch secretary in his union. At this time he helped to set up a workers group across London to link together workers from different industries. At the same time he got involved in anarchist groups that had 'a clear idea of an alternative to capitalism and government, an anarchist society where people make decisions collectively'. Unemployed through much of the eighties, he involved himself with a claimants union in Tottenham and a claimants movement across the country.

When I asked Dave what his influences were, he responded similarly to all the activists I interviewed by saying that it is through the movements –and getting involved with them - that you learn and get inspired: 'It's very inspiring to take part in and support movements and campaigns and struggles that are full of energy and enthusiasm and determination to make the world a better place'. The miners' strike was a 'formative and exciting struggle' for Dave. He got heavily involved with the anti-poll tax campaign - a grassroots movement that was very developed and active in Haringey and out of which was formed the Haringey Solidarity Group. Set up twenty two years ago, Dave describes this as a 'libertarian campaigning organisation' which 'encourages people to campaign and take action to empower themselves' (see also chapter 5, p.97).

He was also involved with London Green Peace, an anarchist environmentalist group through which he became involved in a campaign that was launched against McDonalds 'because they were symbolic of increasing corporate control over society and damage to the environment globally'. Dave was one of the two people to become involved in the famous 'McLibel' case – a defence launched against an attempt on the part of McDonalds to sue Dave and a fellow activist over a pamphlet critical of the company. Dave describes the success of this 'mass anti-censorship campaign' in catching the imagination of the public - the millions of leaflets distributed - and how it became 'one of the pillars of the modern anti-capitalist movement'.

By the end of the McLibel case, 'I'd re-orientated myself back in community campaigning'. One of his main activities in community self-organisation has been the promotion of residents' associations across Haringey. He is currently secretary of the Haringey Federation of Residents' Associations. He says of them that 'these are really significant community self-organisation with massive public support'. Among other groups that he identifies as hugely important both locally and nationally are friends of parks and green spaces groups. He refers to the rapid rise of these groups at the end of the nineties following the major public service cuts of the previous decades. Dave helped to develop the Haringey Friends of Parks Forum to link all forty groups in Haringey, then a London network, and finally a national federation of friends of green spaces to link together the Forums. As campaigns officer for the national federation, he promotes a friends group for every green space, a friends forum or network for every locality, linked together through the national federation 'so we've got a real country-wide grassroots movement speaking out for green spaces'.

At the present time Dave's main area of activity lies with the development of Lordship Recreation Ground, a large open space situated on the western edge of Tottenham. Here £5million has been spent on regeneration led by the community in partnership with the Council. A Friends of the Park group - formed in 2001 and now with 740 members – and nine autonomous groups (covering cycling, walking, wildlife, gardening, sports and performing arts among others) work together through the Lordship Rec Users Forum. 'We're embedding all the groups in the management of the park so that it's about community

empowerment...not just about making improvements and then passively using the park...It's about taking responsibility for the park in partnership with the Council'. He sees this project as a 'beacon' and 'a project that we can really shout from the rooftops about, if there's going to be genuine regeneration and community empowerment then this is the way to do it'.

Pamela is the other of the interviewees to be involved in local activism in Haringey, and has often worked with both Judith and Dave. Her activism has mostly centred on climate change and energy issues, motivated by a scientific perspective of the evidence that human beings need to take positive action to avert disaster. As well as involvement in local grassroots activism, she is deputy-chair of the Haringey Green Party, and has worked on environmental issues in some professional capacities. She prefers attending meetings and adopting roles such as treasurer than getting involved in direct action, 'because I don't mind doing sort of nitty gritty admin stuff...I like to kind of just oil the wheels behind the scenes really...I'm not the sort of person who wants to go out and lie down in the road...I'm not a direct activist really'. She's not a 'touchy-feely' either, and laughingly talks about always having to resist encouragement to attend a monthly local workshop based on the work of environmental author and activist Joanna Macey who espouses a psychological and spiritual basis for personal and social change. We agree that there is a 'spectrum' evident among activists, including in Haringey, and that she is very much on one end of that.

Sustainable Haringey is 'my sort of association'. She sees the importance of the sort of activism she is involved in – and mentions the Transition Movement in the same bracket – as preparing for a difficult and possibly dangerous future. She also mentions – as do Miriam and Danny – the social aspect of activism, so expresses a double motivation: 'As a scientist I think you know the evidence to me points in the direction of things going wrong and anything one can do however small to reverse that direction you just have to do it...And also it's fun too - there's a community - it's a group of people who hold the same views and that's important too.... So it's become a very social thing for me'.

Despite saying that she feels 'politically naïve' she expresses a lot of ideas grounded in what is evidently a wealth of experience in local politics and community activism. After bringing up her idea of a citizen's duty she goes on to say 'I don't know why I think that's the

right thing to do I have no idea where that's come from for me'. She mentions she has no left-wing background, her parents having been more on the right. She is sure that 'if you get involved in any activism you've got to take some political stance really'. However she feels that 'the environment should be above politics' and laments the 'horrible partisan system where you have to be different to the other side - but these problems we have to tackle together and consensual projects as it happens on the continent is much more attractive to me… it's hard work but at least you're trying to thrash out what everybody thinks is the right thing to do and it shouldn't have anything to do with party politics at all'.

Pamela frequently talks about national governments and local councils, as she reflects on cooperation between citizens and government. She cites some European examples of higher levels of locally held power – such as in the communes of France - and of examples of community participation she knows about in Sweden. Her idea of a 'contract' comes into this, which she comments on frequently with a mixture of positive and negative reflections: local authorities 'should be our servants our partners but don't know how to engage the community...don't really listen to what people are saying'. The responsibilities lie with the citizens too: 'it's part of your duty as a citizen to participate in something bigger than yourself'. She does also have some praise for Haringey Council – for example for the councillor who has taken on the challenge of reducing carbon emissions in the Borough. She also recognises that it can be hard for the Council to know how to connect with a network such as Sustainable Haringey, and quotes a case in Oxfordshire where a local activist group received funding to appoint a permanent contact. She thinks much more could be achieved in this way, for it is hard when things are run on an ad hoc basis and entirely by volunteers: 'we are not organised enough to help them so makes it hard for them to help us'.

Sam was one of the three 'younger' interviewees and offered a unique perspective as a doctoral candidate researching Occupy and the practice of occupying. Sam is used to 'floating' between theoretical ideas and practical issues and combining activist and academic approaches: 'I increasingly mix between - and sometimes bring together - my sort of academic and my activist hats'. Throughout this interview there was more reference to a general theoretical level of debate than in the other interviews, and political theory was

woven through his account of activism. He talked about developing a broadly anti-capitalist theory of society, and seeing how all the issues he took on through his activism were interlinked through the production of a capitalist system. He does not label his own politics though, suggesting that his experiences of activism have had an influence on this: 'especially since having been involved in the early years with political parties or groups that support political parties, I've kind of moved away from a politics that tries to define people or something, and I've found it much more open'.

Sam describes his history in activism as a transition from party politics through revolutionary anti-capitalist movements to 'a more DIY direct action approach', noting how his politics have changed over the years. He started his activism with the Green Party, with which he was actively involved for some time, particularly on climate change issues but also in campaigning against the Iraq war. Then, partly because of changes in his political views that developed through his undergraduate studies, he involved himself with Latin American solidarity groups in the UK. His next 'main shift' came about with participation in Climate Camp. This 'grabbed him', as Chavez and other groups had before, and as the Green Party had before that.

He moved to South America – partly inspired by the politics - and was involved in activism there for a few years. His return to the UK to take a Masters at UCL coincided with the student movement with which he became immediately involved; and then came Occupy. Since then he has been involved in a few specific projects including running a community space in Blackfriars called The Cuts Café and an action at Canary Wharf coinciding with the G8 summit called They Owe Us. He 'very loosely associates' these projects with Occupy and remains on the periphery of Occupy. He has also had some involvement with local activism in Haringey where he lives, particularly with the Haringey Solidarity Campaign.

Pete is the oldest interviewee, and his account of activism refers to his experience of the 'sixties what he calls 'a whole social movement which I would define as grassroots activism' that came with the 'seventies. His reflections on activism come from both an historic and also an international perspective which he gained through his working life.

He is very conscious of how poor people have the potential to be exploited or

oppressed – that 'those in power are able to ride rough shod over them'. Born at the end of the war into a working class background in a mill workers' community in Lancashire – his maternal grandparents were mill-workers - he saw mill workers seeking to defend their rights against the mill owners. Later as a community worker in London, he witnessed the intimidation that could be put on tenants by landlords including by threat of violence. More recently, he has witnessed the exhaustion of activists in Palestine. He describes grassroots activism as 'trying to stand up to the bullies'. He notes 'the good news stories are that people do stand up to the bullies...there are many examples of that happening...but also many stories of people being intimidated into submission'.

As a result of his childhood, Pete 'grew up with a strong sense of group solidarity and emotional bonds between people within a group geared to a particular social situation'. He 'valued working class solidarity'. The first member of his family to go to university, as a result of the broadening of access to education initiated by the Attlee government, he attended Durham University from 1964-68, where 'I found myself being drawn towards similar solidarity'. With a friend he set up a local branch of the International Voluntary Service to facilitate voluntary work by students in local mining villages where he 'appreciated being in contact with that sense of solidarity of the mining villages'.

He recalls the 'stifling' and 'very materialistic' environment that followed the austerity of the immediate post-war years, and the reaction against that which came with the 60s which he describes as 'a period in which people went for self-actualisation...where am I going, what am I going to do with my life...nurturing what is unique about the individual as opposed to everyone wanting a safe job and a car and a washing machine and a fridge and so on which is what we were all reacting against I suppose'. At Durham University, he found that 'everyone was complacent, limited in their horizons...I didn't see myself as being...anything in particular but within a day or so I suddenly found myself in a network of leftwing activists, having never seen myself as left wing but somehow we found each other'.

After university he spent two years travelling the world then returned to the UK and worked for two years for the Foreign Office. He 'became active in what might be termed community politics' and joined and then became Chair of the Wandsworth Poverty Action Group which focused on welfare rights. Looking back he realises this was part of a movement

of community activism being actively encouraged often through funding by local authorities. This was a time of 'collective self-expression of whatever it was…I suppose because of my background with my grandparents that kind of struck an emotional chord'.

He left the Foreign Office to retrain as a community development worker at Goldsmiths College. This was a practice-based course involving placements many of which were based in the Waterloo area and geared towards protecting the community against erosion by office developments and ensuring the continued provision of low-cost housing. After this course he worked for five years with a law centre in Balham as a community worker supporting tenant groups and when the funding ended got a job with the London Voluntary Services Council. At this time he formed the Campaign for Homes in Central London. This focused on fighting office developments and the erosion of neighbourhoods through gentrification. A key success was the protection of the area in and around Waterloo along the south bank of the Thames as a public space, from office developments which had threatened to go right up to the water front. Pete notes that they were greatly assisted by having the support of Ken Livingstone and the then Greater London Council – they were 'knocking on an open door - and that's a key element in activism...It makes a huge difference if you've got a responsive council'.

Pete has also had much international experience since his early years of travelling and working at the Foreign Office. He has worked as a political analysis in support of the British aid programme with a network of aid agencies in Afghanistan. Though this was not grassroots, he describes how his community based approach had a strong influence on his work, looking to maximise community involvement and engaging with communities as much as possible. He also describes 'a whole movement of supporting civil society groups in Afghanistan' in particular women's groups and peace movements. More recently he has been involved with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, lending his experience and skills there. For example when invited by an EU-level solidarity campaign to make representation to the Foreign Office, he found that 'going along as a relatively old person, white hair…and having worked in the Foreign Office' was very helpful. Pete draws on his knowledge of a range of international events, including the independence struggle of Aden (now South Yemen), Mandela and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, and the Arab Spring. He quotes

Mao's China, Che Gevara, Castro and Ghandi as important influences. He identifies a 'growing sense of collective identity in the Middle East, in the Islamic world, though it's not clear what direction it's going in - one based on western values or one based on an Islamic movement - but it's clearly a struggle between very powerful vested interests and people mobilising at grassroots'.

Analysis

In these differing personal accounts of activism, there is some notable shared language as well as some contrasts and exceptions. As each interviewee describes what activism means for them, the themes which relate to this study emerge: issues such as agency, empowerment and justice. Similarly the question of what the commons means to them brings up these themes and others relating to the environment, neoliberalism and community. The interviews span the personal, the economic and the political. Some of the interviews tell us about human relationships with the natural environment; and we hear individual reflections – that stem from a combination of personal experience and historic awareness - on the erosion of those relationships over the centuries through the gradual encroachment of capitalism.

The need for fairness and justice is an emotive theme that is common to all the interviews. Each of the activists expresses a strong motivation to make the world a fairer place, this being an essential aspect of making the world a *better* place. Miriam recalls having 'a disgust with injustice' from early childhood; for Pete, activism is about 'standing up to the bullies'. Pamela is very emotional when she says 'I don't want to live in an unfair society'.

The interviewees overall give overwhelmingly positive accounts of their involvement in activism. Each expresses a great deal of enthusiasm and commitment for their activist work. Though all describe some activist events that stand out to them as particular successes, none of the interviewees measure the value of what they do, or judge whether they should be involved, through success; it is the doing, the getting involved, that is important, and the need to try and change things that motivates. For Miriam, simply doing is winning: 'you're

always winning in the sense that you're doing something, that you're putting out positive energy, and if you share that widely then it still inspires other people, whether you end up losing the fight or not you've questioned something, you've like opened a gateway, you've shown something else is possible and that has like untold ripples'.

The environment

Environmental issues are central for four of the interviewees though articulated in a number of different ways. Danny and Miriam identified in a deep, personal and in parts mystical way with nature in a wide sense, both identifying early childhood experiences of a deep connection with nature as one of the roots of their activism. Pamela, however, separates herself from those who are 'into the…spiritual side of things' but nonetheless reflects that the experience of getting out into nature – which she enjoys - 'we miss at our peril'. Judith also expresses concern over the loss of a relationship with the land for most people. Through permaculture - a philosophical design approach based on the ethics: 'earth-care, people-care, fair shares' - Judith puts into practice in her own life a relationship with the natural world. Judith describes permaculture as her greatest influence. She 'does permaculture' in her local area (the Seven Sisters area of Tottenham), organising events and writing about permaculture under the name Seven Sisters Permaculture.

Judith identifies herself as an environmentalist while Danny rejects the word 'environmentalist' in favour of 'ecological' activist. When Danny describes the relationship between environment and society, he stresses how inseparable the natural environment is from the human environment and our economy. He lists among other influences several influential environmental figures such as Polly Higgins, Caroline Lucas and George Monbiot, but when I asked him if he would call himself an environmentalist he said no, and that though other people might call him that, he has started to use the term 'ecological activism' instead of environmental activism 'because ecological encompasses us as well as humans, there's no separation there'. Wall has defined Ostrom as 'not an environmentalist but an ecologist' (Wall 2014:192; see also the discussion at the start of chapter three). Danny quoted Satish Kumar, who on discovering that the London School of Economics, where he had been invited to give a lecture, did not have an ecology department, opened his lecture

by reflecting how strange it was to study economics, originally meaning household management, without studying the 'home'…

Indeed for all of the interviewees, environmental issues are inseparable from the political, social and economic. Dave, while not focusing on environmental issues in activism, was at one point a member of London Greenpeace, and is highly aware of the environmental impact – as well as the social and economic impacts – that global corporations can have. Currently involved with the regeneration of a London park, he focuses on the social aspects of community involvement in the management of an open green space. His interest in parks and green spaces does not arise from either the sense of connection with nature or the strong environmental concern that were voiced by Danny and Miriam. Dave experiences that which Sam represents theoretically through his notion of territoriality: 'it's not that I'm a green space fanatic… it is community empowerment, to me that's why I'm interested in green spaces, I'm interested in the empowerment and the free access aspects of green spaces'.

Miriam has lived in a protest camp in the Icelandic wilderness and subsequently followed the thread of the metal industries to London as the finance capital of the world and now researches and campaigns against an international mining company. Thus the human, social, economic and financial values of the natural environment are each recognised across the interviews, and as we shall see the responses to the notion of the commons were generally very positive. This brings to mind the British poet John Clare whose writing articulated a semi-spiritual, ecstatic connection with nature and included many verses about the enclosure of the commons; as Wall tells us, the sentiments he expressed 'suggest that the enclosure of the commons is intimately connected with the creation of an economic system that degraded the environment and reduced biodiversity' (Wall 2014(iii):86).

Capitalism

A range of political viewpoints and approaches to capitalism are expressed by the activists, spanning participation in politics through the Green Party to anarchism. Pamela focuses on the scope for changing our behaviour within a broadly capitalist system, in order to bring about greater fairness and environmental sustainability while Dave espouses a far

more radical perspective. Several of the activists describe moving through different political outlooks in their own lives. Sam describes how his politics have changed over the years, moving from support of a political party – the Green Party - through solidarity with revolutionary Latin American anti-capitalist movements to the direct action approach of events such as Climate Camp and Occupy. The next chapter looks in more detail at what we can broadly call the pro-capitalist and anti-capitalist positions with regard to the commons. Importantly, however, these differing perspectives do not prevent the activists from working together; what we might call a counter-hegemonic alliance is evident here.

Pete notes that 'capitalism can be compassionate and can be brutal', noting the two such camps in the current British conservative party. He reflects on the link between human rights abuses and capitalism, referring to the general tolerance of the Israeli government's oppression of the Palestinians because of its technological ability to export drones and weapons, describing it as being a 'very brutal regime because it can get away with it and it can get away with it because the capitalist system needs what it can provide'.

Dave is explicitly anti-capitalist. For him, the aim of empowering local communities is in order to change the system – 'ordinary people should be making the decisions rather than unaccountable greedy corporations'. He believes firmly in applying the concept of public ownership to all aspects of society and the need to enhance community involvement in decision-making and management at all levels.

Danny describes himself as post-capitalist and as interested in a 'deeper democracy.' Though saying at one point that 'I would position myself as either an anti-capitalist or a kind of a post-capitalist', he later affirms that he would not identify himself as an anti-capitalist. This, he says, would distance him from many people and set him up against them all and himself too for he like so many of us is 'complicit' in the capitalist world. 'I see beyond capitalism - and so I am trying to transition myself from a cog in the kind of capitalist world to being something that is more ecologically nurturing and sustainable in a...yeah in a post-capitalist era'. Here he describes walking at the edges of two worlds in the manner that Carlsson identifies (Carlsson 2008), creating the new while accepting the entanglement in the old.

Judith refers to Adam Smith's model of a managed market, and notes that market

capitalism can work well as a rational way of sharing resources, but stresses the question remains to be answered as to what are the conditions that should be used to frame the markets which are the domain of capitalism and what the terms of ownership should be. Judith describes neoliberalism as 'laissez faire capitalism i.e. no constraints on.... the owners of property and how they... run their affairs'. She notes: 'The condition, the rules on ownership seem to have got broken and an awful lot of things that arguably should be commons i.e. public and state, shared ownership, have become privately owned...that means that market capitalism is not working effectively'. She refers to the changes brought about 'when traditional land rights systems encounter western private property systems'. She describes a traditional tribal model from the African continent where access to land – which belonged to the ancestors on whose behalf the chief of the village interceded – was dependent on making good use of it; if you were not using it then it was not yours anymore – almost the opposite of private ownership and 'seems a more sensible system'. She says: 'There are a number of things for which markets and capitalism are a very sensible way of working... but in terms of having a society which is a human invention and that functions to provide greatest good for greatest numbers, a rational way of running human society for humans, no, it's broken - and it's been broken by the capitalists; it's extraordinary that society at large is just sort of going along with it and I'm not quite sure what's going to happen'.

Judith organises a seed-swap event each year – she describes this as social event which is about 'taking the garden seeds out of the commercial marketing arena of something that people sell to you, that you buy out of the catalogue, and turning them into a shared resource, a commons'. She sees 'many issues' behind reclaiming the notion that seeds are not necessarily something you have to buy in a packet from a shop. She mentions another local project - Edible Landscapes - which teaches people about foraging wild foods, helping people to develop 'another form of relationship with the wild landscape', and merges into the idea of planting community orchards along the streets and in the parks.

The commons

Bollier claims to identify a shift taking place that is bringing in a new set of conditions to apply to the market which are ones that Judith looks for, and espouse the inherent values that we can hear through all the interviews, and that is the commons: 'The rediscovery of the commons in so many diverse fields is a heartening development. It suggests the beginnings of a new movement to make property law and markets more compatible with a larger set of ethical, environmental and democratic values' (Bollier 2007(ii):38).

Most of the interviewees readily relate to the concept of the commons and apply it to their experiences of activism even if they have not used it before. For example, as part of 'doing permaculture' in her local area, Judith is on the committee of Growing in Haringey, which emerged as an off shoot of the food group of Sustainable Haringey into 'a network for community gardens and sustainable food activities in the Borough… so direct connection with the commons'.

Judith, Miriam and Dave all relate to the control applied under neoliberal capitalism through privatisation on things that should be free or held in common or publicly owned, reflecting Judith's comment that 'many things that should be commons have become privately owned'. She responds to the question of the commons as a model positively: 'potentially yes could be a very useful way of crystallising ideas & challenging ideas'. For Dave, the whole world is the commons; community is a commons; public services are a commons; health care should be a commons; society is the common; everything should be in common. Dave links the commons to the idea of applying the concept of public services to everything and attacking the concept of private property – the reverse of current trends. Dave directly applies the concept of the commons to an embodiment of collective ownership or access more widely: 'everything is the commons...society is the common...everything should be in common...everything should be shared, everything should be collectively cared about ...all the resources and all the decision making should be collectivised...people should run their own lives...communities should run their own communities...workers should run their own work places... so the whole world is the commons'.

Judith and Dave both reflect on the link between the commons and the Friends of Parks movement which embodies an attempt to reclaim a sense of ownership – and a

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practice of community management - of modern urban green spaces. Judith notes concern over the erosion of a relationship with the land for many people, brought about in Britain by the loss of traditional land rights which were 'reduced by feudalism and almost vanished with the enclosures so there is almost nothing left of the commonly felt understanding of a relationship with the land of the sort that is the basis for many indigenous cultures and societies'. In Britain, she notes that 'we get left with back gardens, allotments, parks, rights of way networks in the countryside….fairly feeble remnants!' Natural England, for whom she has worked, has explicit responsibility for areas still designated as commons and works with commoners association. Though Judith doesn't think that many urban people think about their park as a commons – and that the council see them as their property and not commons – she sees the Friends of Parks groups as 'the community actually coming together and recreating/reinventing what is effectively a way of trying to manage the parks as a commons and as a commons association'. Another of her roles locally is as secretary of the Friends of Tottenham Green group, which she describes as a means of addressing the issue of 'how should the community have a role in managing public spaces, the remains of the commons in the area'.

Miriam hasn't used the word or put her work into that context but nonetheless reflects on how closely the word does fits with her work: 'that is very much the core of what the activism I'm involved with is about, it's about...what nature is really for...and the nonsense of the idea of owning nature...and our need to survive on nature...and the access to it and how we all share that responsibility and that connection...and looking at global issues like the takeover of land which basically all these campaigns are about...and the impact that has...and the different ways land is used...It would be good for me to use the word commons more because it's a good way to describe that'.

Though he does not use it himself, Sam identified strongly with the word commons: 'I guess my general sense would be that the commons are, they define, the alternative economic, social, political model'. He was very aware of it and identified that he could substitute it for the word at the heart of his academic work – territoriality. In terms of activism, the commons signified space for Sam – the need and act of having and taking space. He theoretically identified the need to take space with the need to develop new models.

Suggesting that the workplace was perhaps no longer such a relevant or important place as a focus for this, developing spaces outside of this – and crucially beyond the State - was vital: 'What is important is having our own spaces to come together, our own spaces to make, to be able to... relate to each other and think about alternative values'. This can be called developing commons, and thus 'the commons have been an absolutely central feature, almost defining feature' of many of the movements he refers to in his interview. Danny notes that 'commons must apply to our political system'. When I asked him if he thought we could use notions of the commons to articulate contemporary expressions of political identity, his response was emphatic: 'political power and identity - absolutely, absolutely, that's what Peoples Assemblies are about'.

Other than Judith, who was already significantly aware of various narratives and examples of the commons, the interviewees needed the idea of commons to be introduced to them to recognise its centrality to their thinking. The readiness with which they all identified with it, however, suggests its usefulness as a term that can help to make people aware of and articulate a common cause.

Collectivism

The notion of community and cooperation lies at the heart of the commons, as I discussed in chapter two (p.29). In our discussion about the commons, Danny echoes Ostrom when he says: 'We haven't been brought up in a culture of doing things together - we need to change that, that's what we've got to do'. For all the interviewees, this social, cooperative aspect of activism is very important. Danny sees that activism gives people the experience of living and working cooperatively, and for him was one of the great success of Climate Camp, which he describes as a commons: 'the fact that we lived together in a sustainable way as a community modelling the kind of existence that we could have that we have the potential for and by just being in camp together we're teaching people those skills....that was one of the most amazing things about it'.

Pete remembers the sense of community solidarity of his childhood. He also recalls how the mushrooming of community activity that had taken place under Labour withered instantly when the Conservatives took power in 1979: 'Thatcher killed the whole idea of

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community'. She created a generation who have no concept of community or aspirations to change the world and a sense of fear that had not existed previously – afraid of losing their jobs, people now accept conditions which they would not have previously. He identifies 'a strong element of society which is too afraid of not staying afloat to engage in collective action or too exhausted by the daily struggle to do so'. This is the society that Danny has experienced.

For all of the interviewees, activism is a highly social activity, not something done alone; several of them refer to the people they meet and work with through their activism as a key influence and inspiration. Judith, who describes activism as 'seeing something and thinking that's not right and trying to do something about changing it' notes that 'of course doing it with others adds to the effectiveness'. A common theme is the need to re-learn how to live in more cooperative ways. Danny, Miriam and Sam all offer reflections on the experiences of participating in protest camps and direct action as modelling a more democratic, cooperative existence – bringing it into being through living it, a theme that we find in much contemporary activism. For Dave, the key to developing community empowerment is through facilitating community engagement with local projects such as the shared management of a park.

Dave's activism is focused around the community – a word he says he likes and uses a lot because it means a whole range of different things to different people, though at the same time 'everyone thinks it's a good thing'. His politics are rooted in community empowerment, and the importance of encouraging and developing the practice of local, collective responsibility as a way of improving things at a local level. This is about 'trying to get people to be aware, self-confident, about this as a different way, the only way, of society actually collectively making the decisions' and it's a way of creating spaces for the development of 'counter-power to the structures of power and decision-making that are causing the problems that we are having to try and address'. For Dave, local action is inseparable from global concerns: 'you have to be active locally because that's where the people are and that's where you can make a difference but you need also to be part of a global challenge to what is a global system that's causing the problems'. From this perspective, federating is for Dave the logical approach – wider organisations based on

grassroots groups, 'a good way of acting locally but having a global influence'. For Dave, community empowerment is the key goal of his activism.

Empowerment and Agency

The Ecologist noted that enclosure changed networks of power, reducing the control of local people over community affairs (The Ecologist 1993, see chapter three p.60). As noted in the quote included in the heading of this chapter, for Dave 'real politics' is people taking responsibility for their communities, which acts as a 'counter-power'. Dave comments that he would not use the word commons himself, but prefers to use language that is readily recognisable to all such as the word community as noted above. However he readily sees that the concept of the commons articulates his politics: 'real politics is what people do collectively to take responsibility for their lives and their neighbourhoods and their services'. This echoes the argument on the need for citizens' participation to sustain democratic processes, and that it is through participation at this level of grassroots activism – often overlooked, as has been shown and as Dave also notes – that this is taking place even as the relationship between citizens and the state weakens (see chapter 5). Talking about the Friends of Parks groups, he describes them as 'probably the most popular organisations in the UK by far…just virtually not on the political radar at all…ignored…or treated as if they're so embedded that they're not even noticed'.

The idea that is central to Danny's perspective on activism, as it is to each of the activists interviewed albeit in different ways, is empowerment. Danny takes an educational approach to empowerment, working through theatre. Describing a workshop that he created and took to local schools, he notes that 'once you've inspired them to do something you need to actually empower them'; and he describes workshops focused on 'putting the audience at the centre of the narrative so that they become the protagonists but they also are treated as agents of change'. This leads to questions of empowerment and agency. Danny wants to make his audience-participators 'agents of change' - and to give them the tools they need to be so.

For Miriam, good activism should make people 'feel they have agency and capacity'. Miriam identifies education and empowerment as key outcomes of grassroots activism. She

judges 'good activism or good any kind of campaign or any kind of movement of politics or anything, whether it…basically empowers people, whether it educates people, whether it makes people…feel they have agency and capacity'. She talks about grassroots activism in connection with political identity. Activism has 'very much shaped my politics…really being very aware of what empowers people and what disempowers people'. Like Danny, one of the most important aspects of grassroots activism that she returns to often is the social side, the strengthening of community, and the networking. In her account these connections between people - made so much more possible thanks to the internet – between grassroots groups across the world and between Westerners and the global South – is healthy, educative, inspiring, and empowering.

Through these accounts we have heard a convergence of views arising from separate activism over separate if similar causes, the actions described by the interviewees giving meaning and coherence to the ideas of the commons, agency and empowerment. In these stories the idea of the commons is crystallised. The stories we hear through these interviews are examples of the kind of contemporary grassroots activism that is contributing to shaping the politics of the future. We are reminded of the grassroots activists discussed in the previous chapter and elsewhere (e.g. Esteva and Prakash 1998, Hawken 2007, Rutherford 2007). We have heard reflections on the importance of a relationship with the land, articulated in human, environmental, social and political terms, which points to the importance Danny attributes to voicing his concerns in ecological terms in which these can be drawn together. Some of the interviewees express regret over the loss of possibility for a relationship with the land, while working in some cases towards a revival of such a relationship through the communal management of public green spaces which is also seen as a way of building and empowering communities. In another case, an activist is involved in helping communities to protect their land from global mining interests. As well as understanding commons as land, the interviewees also expand its application to other contexts in terms of resources both material and immaterial, and as a concept that can suggest models of cooperative resource management and governance to replace the neoliberal model – what Judith calls the 'money takes all' model of private enterprise.

Through their words and actions, these activists indicate how activism could become a counterforce to the 'ideology of privatisation' (Bauman 2008 and see chapter 1). From the integrated real lives from and about which this selection of activists have spoken emerges a convergence of awareness and concerns: a refusal of neoliberal capitalism and the exploration and creation of alternatives.

Chapter 7

Capitalist or anti-capitalist commons: Beyond the dichotomy

Peer production is matched to both a new market and state model, creating a mature, civic and peer-based economic, social and political model, where the value is redistributed to the value creators. These changes have been carried forward in the political sphere by an emerging commons movement, which espouses the value system of peer production and the commons, driven by the knowledge workers and their allies. (FLOK Society 2014)

At a time when neoliberalism faces multiple crises, with mounting evidence of a widespread failure by both national and international governing bodies to respond to global environmental concerns, the need to seek out new ways of thinking and organising is becoming more widely recognised, while the difficulty of shaping and sustaining change is also increasingly evident. It is not only counter-hegemonic forces that actively seek change; the financial crisis has shown neoliberal capitalism failing even by its own standards, and the environment is increasingly a concern for all. Capitalism has many advocates who argue that more equitable and environmentally sustainable models are needed and possible and who work towards reforming capitalism, while there are those that work towards a future in which all forms of capitalist relationships are replaced. This chapter considers the case made by some proponents of the latter group who express concern over a take-over of the notion of the commons by those who seek only to reform capitalism. It will be argued in conclusion that the commons take us beyond this dichotomy and towards the possibilities of a post-capitalist future. Such a future is suggested in the models and theories put forward by some commentators; it is also made evident at grassroots level.

The activists who were interviewed held a range of different political perspectives that included both reformative and radical approaches to capitalism. As we heard, Judith's perspective was that capitalism can be an effective way of organising the market, but that it has been 'broken by the capitalists' and that through neoliberalism, which is a 'winner take all' system, the 'conditions and rules on ownership seem to have got broken…which means that market capitalism is not working effectively'. All the activists interviewed were seeking to effect change to the current system, whether with a reformative view of redressing its

worst imbalances and restoring a more equitable and environmentally sustainable capitalism, or in a more radical sense of entirely replacing capitalist relations with bottom-up, community-based forms of organisation. These multiplicities of narratives share a commonality of aspirations and values, however, which can be expressed through the language of commons. This study has shown that the search for alternative models for environmental, economic, political and social structures, organisation, relationships and identities find expression in notions of the commons, as resources, relationships and social and cultural spaces are sought to be reclaimed from the enclosing powers of neoliberalism.

The differing views on capitalism did not prevent those who contributed to activities with Sustainable Haringey and other local projects in Haringey from working together; indeed, from my own experiences of activism in Haringey I would argue that while sometimes causing some difficulties, the range of political approaches generally enriched the groups and the activities. The counter-hegemonic movements hold many working relationships, alliances formed through the shared goals of building a different and better future. However, what we are witnessing is perhaps more than simply alliances and solidarity, but rather a post-modern expression of a new politics in a time beyond one of grand narratives. The sense of living in a void in terms of the articulation of a story to challenge the one hegemonic narrative of our time, neoliberalism, as discussed in chapter one, can perhaps be redressed by recognising the possibilities that arise from the diversity and prevalence of exploratory, experimental, counter-hegemonic practices including those we have witnessed taking place at the grassroots of society and that this study has looked at through the lens of the commons. The commons contribute to this counter-hegemonic discourse, providing a model and a language which articulate some of these practices. As Bollier notes:

> We do not have a grand narrative with compelling sub-plots to set forth an alternative vision, one that can both stir the blood and show intellectual sophistication. That's the bad news. The good news is that there is a brave, decentralized movement on the march that is addressing these problems with ingenuity and patience. The focus of this movement is the commons. (Bollier 2007 (i):1)

The fact that the commons as a concept is a contested territory underlines its relevance, and is an indication that anti-enclosure activism and philosophy tell a lasting story and have made their mark over time. The fact that those who aim to reform rather than replace capitalism have adopted the commons as a means around which to develop a more balanced, just and equitable capitalist system may be seen as a victory of the commons, not a hijacking and twisting of its meaning as some anti-capitalist commentators maintain (e.g. Caffentzis 2010, De Angelis 2009, Federici 2011).

Capitalist or anti-capitalist commons

These commentators are concerned that the purpose of a theory of the commons should be to encourage the development of models that will replace the capitalist system. For these anti-capitalist authors, the risk is that if commons theory does not have this as its aim, then it effectively ensures the survival of capitalism; it brings about 'neoliberalism's Plan B' rather than the 'original disaccumulation of capital' (Caffentzis op cit). They argue that by incorporating commons-based models into our current systems, the worst excesses of capitalism in its current neoliberal form can be mitigated which will lead only to ongoing capitalist exploitation. As De Angelis puts it: 'the idea of the commons seems to function less as an *alternative* to capitalist social relations, and more like their *saviour*' (De Angelis 2009:32).

Here we therefore find a contested territory between reformative approaches and radical responses to capitalism. This contested area will be examined in more detail in this chapter, but rather than trying to distinguish between theories of the commons which help to expand the power of capital from those that expand the power of labour, it will be argued that the concept of the commons can be better used to identify newly-emerging trends that cannot easily be identified as either anti- or pro-capital, but begin to manifest alternative models that need to be defined beyond this dichotomy. This is what makes the discourse of the commons uniquely relevant to our era. It will therefore be argued that in order to describe the impact of commons-thinking and commons behaviour we should abandon the

pro-capitalist/anti-capitalist polarisation, for only by doing this can we create the space in which the possibilities of the emergent political and economic sphere can be recognised.

The reach of the discourse of the commons across the political arena has been illustrated in this thesis, as has its use on both sides of the debate over the best ways of achieving the goals of social and environmental justice. There are those who believe that these goals can be achieved by reforming the present system and can be sustained by a growth economy, while others argue that they cannot be achieved through a capitalist system. These arguments were first explored in chapter three, and now we consider whether drawing a distinction between 'pro' and 'anti' capitalist commons helps or hinders our understanding of what the commons might signify in the contemporary context. Is it absolutely essential, as anti-capitalist commentators argue, to draw this distinction, or by doing this do we in fact risk missing something of importance?

The argument of those who fear a takeover of the commons by a neoliberal agenda offers valuable perspectives on the dynamics of commons and enclosures in the international political economy, a topic introduced in the literature review in chapter three and deserving of more attention. Caffentzis links together the various challenges that arose across the globe in resistance to the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), one of the most powerful tools of neoliberal globalisation (Caffentzis 2004). De Angelis calls this the 'heyday of neoliberal globalisation, amidst its assault on all forms of public and common ownership of resources – the era of the 'new enclosures' ' (De Angelis 2009:32). The SAPs were an effective weapon against remaining and future commons, 'devised both to destroy the basis of common property that has been struggled for and defended in the Third World and the so-called First for centuries and to prevent future common property regimes from forming anywhere' (Caffentzis op cit:4). The corner stone of neoliberal international political economy promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund through the 1980s and 1990s, SAPs aimed to promote economic growth in poorer countries. This was a model for growth based on the most aggressive forms of accumulation. 'Just as neoliberal bankers and government officials were demanding the totalitarian transformation of everything into a commodity, many throughout the planet recognized the life-and-death importance of various forms of common property that were rapidly being "enclosed"' (ibid).

The impact of the SAPs, and of the resistance to them, is highly relevant to a study of the commons, and Caffentzis is right to remind us of this. His interpretation of the emergence of the anti-globalisation movements across the globe, united in their resistance to this new wave of enclosures, is important. Caffentzis locates the origins of the 'anti-globalisation' movement in worldwide protest against the SAPS. He notes how resistance around this growing consciousness and expression of the commons united people across the globe by helping them to identify the commonality in their struggles. He offers a Marxist analysis of the historic process of enclosure as experienced in England, Scotland and Ireland, and later across Africa and the Americas through colonisation: 'Thus the commons and the violence of the enclosures constituted the historical language that Marx used to exemplify the logical stage of primitive accumulation, the necessity of separating workers from their means of subsistence'. But while Marx saw this process as 'a one-time historical affair', it can be considered that the logic of primitive accumulation is repeated, for example in the period of neoliberal globalisation (op cit: 8).

Caffentzis poses the question: 'is a politics which calls for the extension of common property to many areas of social life that have been either state or private property inevitably anticapitalist?' His answer to this is 'negative, i.e., capitalist development is compatible with certain kinds of commons and so there is a middle ground between the antiglobalization politics of the commons and the neoliberal globalizers' violent abhorrence of the commons' (op cit: 9). Caffentzis then describes how incrementally, the World Bank – and other international institutions as well as national governments - began to recognise the value of common property in land – and, he suggests, took note of the levels of resistance to the SAPs – and quotes from the 1992 World Development Report to show how a doctrinal reversal took place that made some room for traditional communal land-management practices. Caffentzis remains nonetheless highly critical of the policies and motives of the World Bank and its partners in the international political economy, for example the World Bank's Community Management Programme's attempts to disperse – and in some cases violently repress – grassroots, anti-capitalist resistance, and to increase control of civil society groups.

We have looked at the historic tradition of the commons in England, and the UK

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continues to have important land issues. Britain's model of land ownership, for example, reveals a system 'feudal' in its lack of transparency and equity that ensures high prices for land and therefore property (Cahill 2001). However access to land is contemporarily a more critical issue, relating to primary needs, to far more people across the rest of the world than in the UK and subsistence farmers in many African countries, for example, must make way as swathes of land are sold off to foreign governments for growing food, or to the tourist industry as game parks.

Debates developed in other important areas of commons. The concept of the global commons has become an ever-growing area of concern as environmental issues relating to climate change loom increasingly large as a threat to the ongoing expansion of the capitalist market. Also, issues relating to patenting and intellectual property rights emerged, starting with farmers responding to the patenting of seeds by international companies, and expanding through to the desire to protect the growing commons of the internet. As this thesis has argued, neoliberal accumulation is not limited to the enclosure of land, or indeed to access to natural resources including water, but extends to indigenous knowledge, cultural artefacts, the oceans, the electro-magnetic frequency spectrum and even the human genome; and to the provision of 'public goods' such as intergenerational support systems, education, and health care: 'their doctrinal fate was to be sold to the highest bidder' (Caffentzis 2004:4), echoing Judith's reflections that under neoliberalism 'winner takes all'.

While his description of the background to the emergence of notions of the commons is very useful, I would argue that his conclusion is not. As I will argue more extensively in the concluding chapter, as part of the crisis of values, we are seeing new ways of producing value that, I will argue, neither undermine nor strengthen the capitalist model, but move towards a post-capitalist model, albeit moving through the existing market.

Caffentzis has highlighted the occurrence of two separate events on the commons in 2004, which both took place in Mexico. One was the annual conference of the then International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP) (now renamed as the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC), see chapter two.) The theme of this conference was 'The Commons in an Age of Global Transition: Challenges, Risks, and Opportunities'. The event at which Caffentzis presented a paper (Caffentzis 2004) was a

workshop entitled 'Alter-Globalizations: Another World is Possible'. This was one of a series of workshops which eventually led to the formation of the Centre for Global Justice, 'a centre for research, learning, and support for community led projects and public education forums' (Centre for Global Justice). Whether the two events should be viewed as being in competition with one another, following conflicting agendas is the question Caffentzis raises, and follows this line of questioning to illustrate the debate about capitalist commons. Caffentzis argues for a conflict of interest, despite recognising the possibility that some people might be presenting at both events. He describes 'a use of the concept of the commons that can be functional to capitalist accumulation' and 'the political problem that this capitalist use of 'the commons" (both strategically and ideologically) poses for the anticapitalist movement' (Caffentzis 2004: 1). Discussing common property regimes, Caffentzis notes the importance of distinguishing between 'those regimes antagonistic to and subversive of capitalist accumulation and those regimes that are compatible with and potentiating of capitalist accumulation' (op cit: 22). He describes the same dichotomy in another way: 'what kind of commons will increase the power of workers against capital and what kind of commons would either be compatible with or even expand the power of capital over cooperating workers' (op cit: 26).

For Caffentzis, this is the heart of the dilemma, for everything must be defined as either anti- or pro-capital; there is no possibility of a grey area, or any overlap or ambiguity, and this is the reason why he argues that capitalist use of the commons poses a political problem for the anti-capitalist movement. He designates the other conference, and the body of work of Ostrom and her associates, as acting in defence of capitalism, dubbing them the 'neo-Hardinists', by which he refers to the influential paper by Garrett Hardin published in 1968 in which Hardin argued that collective ownership of a resource would lead inevitably to the over-use and depletion of that resource (Hardin 1968, see chapter 3). The 'neo-Hardinianism' that emerged to counter, or qualify, Hardin's theories, from the late 1980s, also discussed in chapter three, is summarised by Caffentzis, and is criticised here for: 'the discourse they employ seems to assume that the discussion of common property regimes is conducted in the context of a capitalist system' focusing on commodity-producing commons

and leaving out subsistence-producing commons, for example, such as are to be found in Africa, Asia and the Americas (op cit: 22).

This polarity is arguably overly stressed. It suggests that all discourse and behaviour supports capitalism unless it is explicitly antagonistic to capitalism. Either the power of capital or that of labour is increased. This account cannot include, then, the measures by which the power of the producer or labourer is increased in the (capitalist) market place through successful cooperation through a common pool regime, a focus of Ostrom's work. It also negates some of the progress being made in many areas where work is being taken forward within the market and using the market but that undermines the strength of that market at the same time. Indeed Caffentzis himself concludes his talk by noting that it may be very hard indeed to distinguish between commons that are pro- or anti- capitalist.

Caffentzis ascribes the growth of discussion of the commons among reformist camps within capitalism to the success of the anti-globalisation movement, and notes the resulting 'opportunities for alliances' that result from the impact of the anti-neoliberalism voices; but for Caffentzis, these alliances 'pose many political problems'. This overlooks the fact that the development of much commons thinking began prior to the emergence of the anti-globalisation movement, including in the UN during the 1960's as discussed in chapter two; and we return to this in the next section of this chapter. In the preface to her 1990 book *Governing the Commons*, Ostrom tells us that it was in the early 1960s that she began 'to study problems of collective action faced by individuals using common-pool resources' for her PhD thesis (Ostrom 1990: xiii). So it would seem that it might be argued that there have been two streams of commons discourse. It has been well argued that enclosures have long been part of capitalist development, and resistance to this development has manifested itself through a defence or reclaiming of the commons, either actual or in principal; we have identified such a thread running through radical protest in the UK, and witnessed the recent re-emergence of this spirit. Meanwhile the work of Ostrom and others is a more technical approach to solving problems emerging from the management of common pool resources within a capitalist market.

Written as a response to Ostrom's award of the Nobel Prize for economics, an article by De Angelis (2009) was published in *Turbulence: Ideas for Movement*, a journal which aims

to 'become an ongoing space in which to think through, debate and articulate the political, social, economic and cultural theories of our movements, as well as the networks of diverse practices and alternatives that surround them' (Turbulence 2008). The Turbulence collective's description of their aims reminds us of the diversity of the contexts where use and discussion of the concept of the commons is found.

The article by De Angelis is entitled 'The tragedy of the capitalist commons', a play on the title of Hardin's article. De Angelis analyses the use of the concept of the commons within the pro-growth, capitalist model of 'sustainable development' and argues that wherever and whenever commons are tied with capitalism they are inevitably 'distorted' (De Angelis 2009:32). By this he means that 'capital has successfully subordinated non-monetary values to its primary goal of accumulation' (ibid).

Clearly the commons are tied to capital in some way or another. For Bollier, 'the commons is always a third force in political life, always struggling to express its interests over and against those of the market and the state' (Bollier 2007(ii):33). While condemning the many limitations of the market system he concludes: 'I do not believe that the commons and the market are adversaries. What is usually being sought is a more equitable balance between the two. Markets and commons are synergistic' (op cit p.38).

De Angelis also recognizes what Bollier described as 'a brave, decentralized movement on the march that is addressing these problems' (Bollier 2007 (i):1): 'an increasingly vocal part of the left started to conceptualise alternatives to neoliberalism and sometimes even capitalism in terms of commons: non-commodified forms of social cooperation and production. At the time commons seemed to offer a way out of the impasse between free-market capitalism and Eastern bloc-style state-capitalist planning' (De Angelis 2009:32). For De Angelis, the idea of the commons has been hijacked by a dangerous discourse about the global commons which risks bringing forth solutions based on capitalist growth, based on the idea that capitalist markets are a force for good and the premise that environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive growth are possible within them, which he disputes (ibid).

Caffentzis identifies what he calls the 'Midas limit' that capitalism can reach, which is 'individualism gone wild', when 'all transactions are based on pure utility maximising without

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any concern for the poorly sanctioned rules of fair exchange, and hence are surfeited with fraud and deception', the subprime mortgage crisis of 2007 leading to the worldwide recession in 2009 being the latest example of this 'Midas limit' (Caffentzis 2010: 31). He, like De Angelis, argues that pro-commons discourse and models may in fact ensure the survival of capitalism, enabling it to save itself from its own worst excesses, 'from its self-destructive totalitarian tendencies unleashed by neoliberalism' (op cit: 23).

The discourse of the commons can thus be hijacked, and put to the service of capital, it is argued by Caffentzis and other anti-capitalist commentators, making it essential to distinguish between a theory of the commons that saves and supports capitalism, and one that is anti-capitalist and prefigures a post-capitalist future. According to Federici: 'We must be very careful, then, not to craft the discourse on the commons in such a way as to allow a crisis-ridden capitalist class to revive itself, posturing, for instance, as the environmental guardian of the planet' (Federici 2011). The 'individualism gone wild' problem of neoliberal capitalism is also recognised within the pro-capitalist camp, so rejection of this model does not necessarily lead rejection of capitalism itself. However, for those whose goal is the overthrow of capitalism, a theory of the commons must go much further than mitigating the worst excesses of neoliberalism, and must bring about an end to the capitalist system; these commentators view the commons as a contested territory.

Transcending the dichotomy

But should we really see in the commons discourse two streams, distinct and emerging from different sources? This seems an artificial divide, one that is sustained only when we view the world through the anti- or pro-capitalist dichotomy. The evidence suggests that a better way to describe the contemporary rise of the commons is that it has a myriad of sources, and surfaces in the human story again and again and all over the world as humanity struggles with the perennial problem of living together and of sharing resources, at both local and global levels. This is not to deny the historic role that capitalist development has played – and continues to play - in enclosing lands or resources, and the inequalities of power

through unequal access that this process has engendered. Nor is it to suggest that out of the commons discourse can emerge any sort of panacea that can be applied globally, for the particularity of different local realities will always render such a vision meaningless. Nonetheless, instead of arguing for an anti-capitalist theory of the commons, there is sufficient evidence to support the claim that the commons allow us to transcend this dichotomy.   Bauwens suggests that activists move through this dichotomy, and that the power of the commons as a model is that it can also do this: 'I stress the search for commonality of purpose in directions that transcend the old industrial left-right divide. Not because I believe in compromises with neoliberalism…' (Bauwens 2011(i))   For some, the commons represents a model that goes far beyond the debates so far considered in this chapter, and have articulated the potential of commons-based approaches to models of a post-capitalist future. In the commons, we see a profound shift. Describing the evolution of open source and peer to peer production, one of the manifestations or strands of commons-based practices, Bauwens notes 'I think this is affecting every aspect of thought, including spirituality and philosophy. I think this is a deep shift in ontology, in value systems, in epistemology – how we know things. It is a restructuring of our social DNA – initially within the old system' (Bauwens 2010(i)).

While it may be true that the anti-globalisation movement brought the commons discourse to a much wider audience in the 1990s, including to the WTO and the World Bank, it should also be remembered that a form of commons discourse was present within the UN in the 1960s, at a time when that institution harboured more radical approaches, in early discussions on the Common Heritage of Mankind agenda. Federici is dismissive of this discourse, and it is true that the final document, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, adopted in 1994, had lost much ground through compromise, and so Federici makes the criticism that it merely 'revised the international law governing access to the oceans in ways that enables governments to concentrate the use of seawaters in fewer hands, again in the name of preserving the common heritage of mankind' (Federici 2011). Moreover, the amount of common seas has gradually been eroded by the development of Exclusive Economic Zones and more recently by the contiguous continental shelf claims. However, it is questionable whether we should view the adoption of some commons

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discourse in the approaches of capitalist policy makers either purely as a concession made in the face of mass resistance and protest across the globe, or as a means to neutralise the ultimately self-destructive logic of neoliberal development and thereby acting as capitalism's saviour, both arguments put forward by Federici. Rather, it might be argued that this was evidence of a fairly considerable shift in thinking in the mainstream at that time, before neoliberalism came to dominance.

While much of what Caffentzis and Federici describe is convincing, a core question remains open: how useful is this approach in furthering our understanding of the significance of the emergent commons discourse? Do we need to insist on refining a definition that distinguishes between a capitalist and an anti-capitalist ideology? Is it useful to criticise a huge body of work essentially for not being anti-capitalist, when that body of work makes no claims and has no pretensions to being anti-capitalist? Caffentzis does concede that in many cases, 'it is not often clear when a commons 'mixes' in such a way with markets that it has a positive or a negative effect on accumulation' (Caffentzis 2010:37). Similarly, he recognises that 'it is not easy to distinguish in general the two sides of a commons in practise. Does it lead to more power for workers against capital or does it lead to the ability of capital to better exploit workers?' (Op cit: 38) For Caffentzis, this makes the challenge of 'being clear about the conflicting uses of the notion of the commons' critically important (op cit: 41). He concluded his 2004 paper by noting: '...it might be necessary to mix wine with water, but you should know what is the wine and what is the water!' (Caffentzis 2004) Perhaps the distinction is so hard to define that it may be more valuable to allow the two to mix and look then at what theory emerges from this blend.

Models of production, distribution and organisation are now emerging which are not best understood by attempting to clarify whether they are either antagonistic to or potentiating of capital accumulation. While they might be defined as being compatible with capitalism in the short term, they can simultaneously allow for a greater strength to emerge that balances, and eventually supersedes, that of capital in the longer term. It would seem that this is one of the potentials that commons-based approaches contain. Bauwens responds to the above debates with the following:

This is an argument that I have with the left which will say you can see open source being co-opted by capital so this cannot possibly be the answer. I am saying that not necessarily that co-optation is good, but that this is a very positive sign. The fact that it is co-opted by capital is exactly what will make it strong. Feudalism in crisis used capital to survive another 250 years. (Bauwens 2010(i))

The Occupy movement is one in which we can see the distinction between anti-capitalism and reformative approaches receding, as Bauwens and many others identify. The movement has also brought together and blurred the lines between activists/occupiers, academics and ordinary citizens, creating spaces for the separate paths usually walked in these different roles to cross. Bauwens led talks both at the Tent City University at the Occupy London site at St Paul's Cathedral and also at the Bank of Ideas (see chapter 5, p.106). One of the arguments put forward in this thesis is that it has been through the work of grassroots activists that concepts of the commons have both been kept alive through history, and have manifested themselves in new ways in the late 20th and early 21st century. This is increasingly recognised by a growing body of work, and the particular relevance of the Occupy movement has been recognised by Bauwens and many others. It is clear that, among other things, it is the diversity of political positions among Occupy activists (or the absence of a clearly held political ideology in the traditional sense), and the support that they have received from across civil society, that indicate to Bauwens the relevance of this movement. He identifies in Occupy one of the requirements that he believes are needed for social change: 'A genuine mass movement. As the first native movement and great hope of the digital age that is what #ows [Occupy Wall Street] is all about' (Bauwens 2011(ii)). The requirement for 'concrete alternatives that can change our lives and allow us to live our values right now' is provided in commons-based peer production, 'a new way of producing value' (ibid).

From the interviews we gained insights into how such trends can manifest in the work of grassroots activists. Judith cited the example of the altering of the place of seeds - both in the market and in our perceptions – that a community activity such as a 'seed-swap' day invokes. Dave and Judith both reflected on the impact that community management of parks and open spaces can have, while expressing different views on capitalism: Judith commented

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on the appropriate place of the market, for example, and held Adam Smith's model in regard, while Dave articulate a more radical anti-capitalist position.

Also to this argument should be added the reflection – further answering the question what is capitalism – that if capitalism is so different to its current nature, is it still capitalism – or what does it matter if it is? Is it simply a question of the power of capital, the process of capital accumulation? Or is what really matters to humanity the question of how equitable and sustainable it is? Arguably capitalism cannot be either equitable or sustainable, by definition (the latter given the finite limits of the environment to sustain economic growth as we know it) – or could it be a question of degree? If our model of work and exchange was equitable and environmentally sustainable, would it still be defined as capitalism? Referring to the work of Ostrom and the focus of the IASCP conference, Caffentzis notes: 'Our questions concerning the commons is not of the "efficiency, sustainability, and equity" of a property regime, but of whether a particular commons increases the power of workers to resist capital and to define a non-capitalist future' (Caffentzis 2004). We urgently need to find ways of working that bring more sustainability and equity, be they defined as capitalist or not; and would a non-capitalist future necessarily be a sustainable and equitable one? This is also recognised by Bauwens: 'eventually it is the market that will be subsumed by the commons. I am not saying that the market will disappear, but I am saying that capitalism will disappear if you define it as unlimited growth in a finite world – that system cannot last' (Bauwens 2010).

Some theorists, as we have discussed above, focus on the end of capitalism as the goal of commons theory. This approach limits the potential of concepts of the commons and cannot fully describe the 'deep shift in ontology, in value systems, in epistemology' (Bauwens 2010), which is embodied in commons-based approaches to practice and policy. Concepts of the commons enable us to effect change, to be radical, to look at the roots of our systems. They provide alternatives to the predominant (neoliberal) world view that underpins our social and economic relationships, and has shaped our legal and political systems. That which is most relevant about the contemporary commons discourse is that it transcends the dichotomy which some authors wish to emphasise. By insisting on the dichotomy, we miss the most radical, transformative element of commons-based approaches. The capitalist/anti-

capitalist dichotomy is therefore not the fundamental dichotomy, and moves us away from the real task of reconceptualising the political and economic sphere. The discourse of the commons, and the models of behaviour which it describes and engenders, reveal and sustain emerging post-capitalist concepts.

The span of the commons-based approach identified in this study reveals a struggle to move forward beyond the constraints and shortfalls of present-day systems that is taking place across extremely diverse social situations in the world today. We have seen how some of these struggles have manifested solidarity across the globe: alliances across traditional divisions characterises much present day protest and activism, while the examples of particular struggles such as that of the Zapatistas have resonated across the globe. This thesis has also identified an even wider range of activity beyond this conscious solidarity, providing evidence of diverse struggles working towards a post-capitalist future which find a shared language in the commons.

Individuals all over the globe – people who are activists or theorists, or in many cases both – are exploring alternative models in a myriad of different ways and locations. In one way or another, whether by establishing community gardens in cities or free software organisations on the internet, or indeed envisioning and claiming new models of sovereignty as the Zapatistas and Inuits have begun to do, workers and citizens change their relationship with capital and the state and prefigure a new politics. They do not wait for the system to change to allow them to live and to work differently; they change how they live and how they work wherever they can. The examples used in this study have shown that the common denominator of the contemporary struggles, protests and projects is a rejection of neoliberalism; historically, these struggles have at other times resisted earlier forms of capitalism as well as pre-capitalist and state communist systems. Rather than focusing on the system itself and how it might be reformed or replaced, the focus of this thesis is on the people living out these new forms, hence the centrality of activists and other actors: people engaged in a process of freeing themselves from capitalism.

Chapter 8

Conclusions: Reclaiming the commons?

I should also note that together with the government, civil society initiatives and social movements in Ecuador have a long history of contributing to a common, open knowledge society. This aspiration positions Ecuador within a global community of Internet activists, researchers, hackers, and commoners of all kinds who have long been waiting to join a political, social, and institutional commitment to designing a new economy and society based on the principles of a free knowledge commons. (Daniel Vazquez, FLOK, from an interview by Bethany Horne)

The hegemonic power of neoliberalism (Dawson 2010, Hall 2011, Harvey 2005, see chapter 1) has succeeded in making the prospect of alternative political-economic systems difficult to imagine. The struggle of left wing political parties to present an ideological alternative to neoliberalism is but one manifestation of this gap in our collective imagination. In a supposedly post-ideological age, capitalism has spread from the work place to embed itself in approaches to governance, education, health and all culture, while creating the illusion that neoliberalism is not an ideology but a pragmatic, common sense approach to managing the world's resources.

In the UK, the Coalition government that was formed in 2010 presented its regime of austerity measures as the only option during the course of its management of the national debt and the economic crisis, taking the last decades of what Fisher has called 'capitalist realism' to a new zenith (Fisher 2009). This approach is epitomised by the Coalition government's health reforms, prompting Stuart Hall to comment (in an interview for the *Guardian* newspaper): 'The principle that someone shouldn't profit from someone else's ill health has been lost. If someone says an American health company will run the NHS efficiently, nobody can think of the principle to refute that. The guiding principles have been lost' (Williams 2012).

This thesis has illustrated how, despite the lack of a cohesive opposition or a single articulated counter-hegemonic ideology – or perhaps because of this lack – a groundswell of people outside of political parties and outside of mainstream politics, personally engaging

with local and global issues, has become an identifiable growing trend in recent years, in some cases fuelled by modern technologies while building on long traditions of protest and resistance.

The research question that this thesis has explored is whether the concept of the commons, articulated in theory and in practice by writers and activists, provides a challenge to dominant neoliberal thinking and a way of rethinking radical politics. In order to address this question, I have sought to develop our understanding of the commons and recognise the impact of those grassroots activists who have played a key role in defending and developing commons. I have explored what is meant by 'the commons' in historical and contemporary political and academic debate and action and have analysed the contentious relationship between capitalism and the commons. Through a literature review and through a case study I have shown examples of a new kind of politics and political identity emerging through contemporary grassroots activists and notions of the commons. This analysis has confirmed the importance of the 'reclaim the commons' movement to the formation of a radical political alternative to neoliberalism.

The global uprisings of 2011 represented the culmination of a growing space of change, which finally broke through the surface and entered mainstream attention when protestors took to the streets and challenged the authority of their governments. These protestors did not look to a party for an ideology or to lead their revolution; they self-organised and spoke their own language to describe their needs and ambitions. A 'networked generation' had emerged across the world from California to Egypt showing 'resistance against austerity and the dominance of a global political elite intent on maintaining their grip on power' among whom could be seen 'the use of the latest technologies to grow democracy anew and experiment with forms of social and political organisation' (OurKingdom 2012).

Many of the grassroots activists included in this thesis have similarly identified and addressed for themselves the needs of their communities in the absence of satisfactory governmental policies or in the face of oppression. Building on centuries-old traditions of resistance and rebellion in the face of capitalist expansion but also aided by the technological developments of new social media, activists and citizens across the globe have found the

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means and the language to begin to make manifest alternative realities. While there is the risk of ever more authoritarian governments taking tighter and tighter control of dwindling resources for an ever more powerful and wealthy elite – and there is no shortage of examples of this tendency either - there exists a multiplicity of alternatives that are being explored, invented, practiced and defended.

As has been discussed in chapter one, this level of grassroots activism was largely overlooked by mainstream media, academia, business and political parties. As a result of this oversight, expert commentators including academics largely failed to imagine that the kind of protests that took place in 2011 would play out across the globe, and the establishment was taken by surprise. There was a broad consensus that public engagement in mainstream politics had dwindled to an all time low, as evidenced in low turnouts at elections; the youth were especially characterised as politically apathetic. Yet the lack of participation identified through the decreasing numbers of people voting that was taken as a sign of disengagement was perhaps an indication that people were finding new and better forms of political engagement. Indeed a groundswell of grassroots activism has been described by some writers, often those outside or on the edges of mainstream academia, or strongly connected with an activist milieu (e.g. Bauwens, Bollier, Carlsson Esteva, Klein, Hawken).

This study has explored this activism and shown how numerous men and women working at the grassroots of society shape the future through their concrete engagement with some of the most entrenched problems of our times, finding ways of initiating new practices and new visions in their local communities. Activity at this level makes a significant contribution to finding ways forward in meeting the social, economic and environmental dilemmas that humanity faces across the globe and contributes to the development of democratic processes. Having shown the participatory, non-hierarchical, community-centred ways of working that characterise these activities, we can confirm that we have the necessary ingredients for the reinvention of democracy that as Kivisto and Faist remind us, is required for its survival (2007, see chapter 4, p.74).

Drawing on Rutherford (2007) we can also identify in the work of many activists new forms of political activity that take place outside of the old structures and defy the old political categories. A discourse for a new politics emerges from this, a politics connected to

the grassroots of society instead of dominated by an elite, and which emerges from the great social, environmental and economic needs of communities across the globe. Innovation and upheaval occurring at the grassroots are indeed a sign of the times in early 21st century and as Alex Salmond said after the Scottish referendum of September 2014: 'But today the point is this. The real guardians of progress are not the politicians at Westminster, or even at Holyrood, but the energised activism of tens of thousands of people who I predict will refuse meekly to go back into the political shadows' (BBC News 2014).

This thesis has described how alternatives to the hegemonic conceptual world of neoliberalism can begin to be told through the language of the commons. It has tried to identify from a multitude of voices and actions a shared set of values which might be described as the language of the commons, and has shown how the realities that can be given meaning through this language challenge the hegemony of neoliberalism. In this final chapter, the ideas developed throughout this work are drawn together in order to offer a final analysis of the significance of the commons. This will include proposing that the key to understanding the relevance of the commons for the future is asking what new models they suggest for managing access, a question first raised in chapter two (p.29-30).

An element of managing the commons is about limiting access to the commons, for example by businesses. This is reflected in much of the discourse around managing the global commons and environmental issues, and negotiating access to the commons between nations, for example around the areas of high seas around the Arctic. It is also about ensuring equal access to knowledge and resources for individuals and communities. In all cases, the dynamic is a reclaiming of space from the market state, and a new imposition of control on access by the market and the state to the commons. The commons are the 'third force' proposed by some commons theorists (Barnes 2006, Bollier 2003 and 2007(i)) that can restore a balance in the capitalist market-place by providing a counter-weight to the powers of corporations and government; they can be the means to an anti-capitalist end as long as we do not allow them to be usurped by capitalism (Caffentzis 2010, De Angelis 2009, Federici 2011); they represent an emerging post-capitalist future that grows through but takes us beyond lives shaped by neoliberalism (Bauwens 2010(i)).

The issue of access lies at the heart of the political sphere, and is increasingly the

point of contention around which struggles emerge, whether it be access to land, access to energy resources, or access to the provision of services such as health and education. Equal access to these resources – to all the planetary resources and the resources of human knowledge and output – lies at the heart of the democratic process and is often confronted and impeded in its progress by the legal structures that define our political and economic systems, rather than being enabled and safeguarded, as a commons approach would seek to do. The essential aspect of managing the commons is managing *access to* the commons; the commons can be understood in terms of the *access to* them.

Reclaiming the commons

This study has explored many manifestations of alternative political cultures being formed at the grassroots. This surge of activity at the grassroots has been called a 'movement' (e.g. Bollier (2007(ii)) and also a 'movement of movements' (e.g. Hawken 2007) and others have identified a language that expresses a momentum that these movements share which is about 'reclaiming the commons' (Klein 2001) (see chapter 5). These movements suggest the possibility of a future in which capitalism is reformed or overturned through new economic and political practices that respect environmental sustainability and human equity, as has been explored in the previous chapter. It has been argued that through the commons we find a language that describes these initiatives, a story that binds them, and a vision that defines the politics that represent them. The commons movement identified by some signifies a search for alternate possibilities that is felt globally, a recognition of and a search for realities that lie beyond the scope of capitalism that are becoming manifest in many different spheres; through the naming of them, they are rendered visible to others; by making it more possible for people to believe in them, they are helped into being. Linebaugh referred to 'the suppressed praxis of the commons in its manifold particularities, despite a millennium of privatization, enclosure, and utilitarianism' (Linebaugh 2008:19). As I reflected in chapter one, this study has taken on the 'fight over what can be seen, said and heard' (Hughes 2012:130, see chapter 1, p. 6).

The impact on power relations of technological advances in means of communication and their widespread availability – mobile phones, the internet – has been discussed (see chapter 1, p.16). The new media technologies of the telecommunications revolution have opened up news reporting and information sharing and cannot be so readily controlled, giving citizens easier access to both produce and receive news and information. The commons is both manifest in this area of development – in such examples as open source software, production models and free licensing which endorse collaboration rather than competition – and also supported by these new technologies of communicating and knowledge sharing.

It is human actors who carry forward change; many citizens work for change, among these the grassroots activists described and interviewed in this study. I have shown how the wide range of contemporary usages of the word 'commons' embodies a growing dissatisfaction with the balance of social, economic and political power in the modern world and represents a global surge of creativity and innovation in thinking about and devising alternative models through which the following aims are better approached: social empowerment for individuals and communities; equitability and agency in economic life; political agency; and protection for the natural environment from unsustainable exploitation.

References to the commons are now found in discussions about the personal, the social, the economic, the political and the environmental. Individuals participate in all these spheres of life and so are affected by – and affect – them all; the commons terminology can be used to discuss all of life, as came through strongly in several of the interviews. The term has no direct political affiliations having been used, as we saw in the previous chapter, in both reformist and radical camps as a means of expressing new ideas and describing alternative economic models to the contemporary neoliberal version of capitalism. There are many protagonists of the notion of the commons and of the use of commons terminology to aid the development of new models of governance – for the economy, for the environment, for knowledge and information sharing to name but a few of the spheres that are being influenced by a commons approach. Overall, the aims are broadly the same: to allow for greater agency for participating individuals and communities and to thereby provide counterbalances for the powers of the market and of the state.

At a global level, activism aimed at removing or affecting these same powers has been prolific over the last two decades. This research was always intended to be firmly placed in the context of contemporary events. This has resulted in the inclusion of reflection on the extraordinary burst of activism that was witnessed across the world from late 2010 onwards. The link between this wave of events and the original topic of this research has justified, indeed demanded, their inclusion. These have taken form in, among others, the Zapatista uprising, protests at G20 summits, the Arab spring, the Spanish 'indignado' movement and the Occupy movement. These were headline-grabbing events, but also engendered international networking and solidarity of new dimensions and brought about new and unexpected alliances aided by new social networking technology.

That commons exist cannot be denied, and chapter two provided a typology of the types of commons that are identified in the world today. In chapter three, a selective literature review showed some examples of how the commons have been conceptualised. Commons are defined by being that which are not identifiably 'owned' by or on behalf of any individual or group of individuals; it is more than common or shared 'ownership' in any narrow, legal sense; the commons defy this approach to ownership. Chapters four, five and six focused on the activists and other citizens, whose actions defend, invent and grow the commons, challenging the domination of market and state forces. These are the actors who are 'reclaiming the commons'. Chapter seven argued the case for moving beyond the dichotomy of pro-capitalist and anti-capitalist commons.

The commons as land have been physically contested territory, subject to waves of protection and enclosure – some have called it theft - since feudal times. The history of capitalism can be told as a story of enclosure and the resistance to this momentum as struggles to 'reclaim the commons'. The contemporary Occupy movements can be seen as the latest manifestation of an historic trend. There is a continuum of the commons, surviving in practice and as an idea. We have seen how Linebaugh (2008) traces a particular history of the idea of the commons, describing its rise and fall in law itself as well as in the aspirations of lawmakers and the ambitions of socially conscious governors (chapter 3, p.48). Bauwens has described an ancient and re-emerging philosophy of the commons, and the construction of a new world based on the commons, civil society and peer production (Bauwens 2010(ii)).

This is vividly embodied in the message of activist movement Occupy (see chapter 5, p.101). Addressing the question about how to re-order the capitalist market, Bauwens is clear that the commons act as an infiltration which can fundamentally change the logic of capitalism: 'In the vision of a commons-based society, the market is subsumed under the dominant logic of the commons' (ibid). Bauwens was appointed head of a strategic research project for the government of Ecuador, the FLOK project – 'Free/Libre Open Knowledge Society, designing a world for the commons' (FLOK 2014, see also citation at head of chapter). This project proposed to make fundamental change to the country's legal, economic and social framework, not through radical left-wing revolution but by creating and empowering peer networks.

A range of different uses of the discourse of the commons have been outlined in this study in order to illustrate the emergence of a shared language, that of the commons, that provides us with a way of connecting a broad spectrum of activity and concerns. The interviews in chapter six confirmed how readily the term could be attached by activists to how they conceived of their work. This activity both emerges out of and contributes towards changing attitudes and beliefs that are evolving in multiple ways and are altering the way that the world is perceived, as values and relationships shift, and the technologies through which people can communicate with each other evolve. This study traces some of these changes, drawing them together through the story of the commons. The political relevance of this is an attempt to re-embed a sense of the politics in the concerns and actions of everyday life. Though the issues addressed in this study often revolve about economic and social questions, it is through political power – if not ultimately through military power, whether through the legitimised violence of the nation state or the armed struggles of other actors - that the central issue of agreeing who gets (access to) what is decided. The relevance of the commons, of occupying and reclaiming, and the questions about who has access to what, are therefore essentially political questions. By emphasizing in this way the connections between the political, social, economic and environmental, an attempt is made to reclaim politics.

The New Statesman's Political Studies Guide 2011 focused on the engagement of the general public in politics, as discussed in chapters one and four. In that publication, Alice

Miles reflected on barriers to this engagement which are thrown up by the nature of the academia of politics departments in the UK. John McDonnell (Labour MP for Hayes and Darlington at time of writing) celebrated the student protests that 'startled the establishment' on 10th November 2010 and noted that 'there is a neglected history of radicalism in this country that has regularly, generation after generation, exhibited itself in protest and direct action' (McDonnell 2010). In chapter five, I outlined some of this history. A year later, evidencing the impact of the protests of 2010-2011, the New Statesman's Political Studies Guide 2012 reflected on 'the year politics changed'; it was noted in the introduction to the guide that 'studying politics now is probably more exciting than ever' (New Statesman 2011). Summing up the political highlights of 2011, Owen Jones emphasised the impact of grassroots activism in the title of an essay he writes for the publication: 'State of Play: Is a political shift on the cards or will the status quo prevail? The answer may lie with the grass roots' (Jones 2011(i), and see chapter 4). Meanwhile *Time* Magazine announced its Person of the Year 2011 to be The Protestor as follows:

> For capturing and highlighting a global sense of restless promise, for upending governments and conventional wisdom, for combining the oldest of techniques with the newest of technologies to shine a light on human dignity and, finally, for steering the planet on a more democratic though sometimes more dangerous path for the 21st century, the Protester is TIME's 2011 Person of the Year. (Stengel 2011:41)

One of the inspirations for this thesis was the suggestion made by some commentators (e.g. Hawken 2007; Scholte 2005) that a gathering force was emerging globally at grassroots levels which was passing largely unrecognised. My research question was to ask whether this movement might prove itself to be of considerable importance, not least because it challenged, if nothing else, the assumption that the sort of civil involvement required for healthy democracies was at an all time low. Events of 2011 showed that it was a mistake to have assumed that it had been political passivity and disengagement that had most typically characterised civil society across the globe, whatever the turnout at elections may have been in those countries where free elections were held. In quick succession, the

world was apparently taken by surprise by student demonstrations in the UK in November 2010, a wave of mass street demonstrations through much of the Arab-speaking world beginning in Tunisia in January 2011, the encampments of the 'indignados' in Spain that began on May 15th and the Occupy protests that took place in around 1000 cities across the globe beginning on Wall Street on 17th September of the same year. It may also be a mistake to have underestimated how much of a challenge such activists might pose to the status quo, particularly as they have gained the sympathy and understanding of a wide audience both nationally and internationally. While few of us are involved in life or death situations in the defence or pursuit of a more equitable society, the stakes have been that high for some people. Many protestors have been killed, or subject to violence and imprisonment, over the centuries and all over the world. In 2011, hundreds lost their lives in the struggles in the Middle East; some of their names have become internationally renowned, such as Mohamed Bouazizi; the names of countless others will not. *Time* magazine's nomination of The Protestor as their 'person of the year' speaks of the impact that these events have had on mainstream media and politics.

Commons as a right of access

What is capitalism, but a name that was given to describe a set of relations and dynamics several hundred years after what we would now define as capitalism had been going on? It was applied retrospectively; capitalism could only be given a name once it had been sufficiently established to be distinct and recognisable. Though Marx's work later provided an extraordinarily broad, deep and insightful account of the dynamics of capital versus labour, he himself never used the term 'capitalism'.

As noted in chapter one (p.4), the 1960's saw the emergence of a new narrative about the environment. This gave a generation and future generations of people a common language with which to discuss a wide range of issues in an inter-related way which had not previously had a unifying context identified which could bring them together. This had a huge

impact on the influence that these issues could have, by being presented as part of a greater whole which could not be ignored.

What this study has sought to show is that the concept of the commons similarly gives the possibility to bring together a range of issues which when viewed in combination represent both a crisis that is taking place that must be recognised and a force that must be reckoned with. As many commentators have suggested, models based on notions of commons play a dynamic role in providing new economic models, moving us beyond an anti- or pro-capitalist dichotomy, and bringing about epistemological and ontological shifts (Bawens 2010 (i), Bollier 2003, and see chapter 1, p.3-4). Developing a new language of the commons assists us in arresting the trend of market value domination over all and the negative effects of that over community, scientific enquiry and democratic culture (Bollier op cit). Bauwens, for example, calls for 'a global coalition of the commons, which combines the forces of social justice (workers and labour movements),the forces for the defense of the biosphere (green and eco-movements) and the forces for a liberation of culture and social innovation (free culture movement), as the constituent blocks of a new hegemony' (Bauwens 2011(i)).

The values that emerge from a growing awareness of the commons reflect and embody a renewal of a sense of ownership in a new and much broader sense. The forms of ownership that we know through capitalism award an exclusive right of use and access with little in the way of any enforcement of responsibility on the 'owner' to consider the wider common good in their use of that which they own, and little space afforded to considerations of limits to those rights, that are enshrined in our laws of private property. One of the effects of the access to land and resources that this system has given to corporations has been uncontrolled environmental damage, one of the most serious of contemporary global issues, and which the world now struggles – and largely fails – to redress.

Concepts of the commons replace this model of ownership with a guarantee of access that is inclusive rather than exclusive, and which we can say becomes an expression of agency. While anti-capitalist commons theorists demand a theory of the commons that strengthens labour in its resistance to capital, other commons theorists use concepts of the commons in reformative approaches to capitalism, making the commons into a 'third force'

to mitigate the power of the market and the state. We can move beyond the debate about capitalism through a narrative that focuses on agency through access. This translates into an increase of the influence of collective action and the common good, for access to commons must either be collective, or must respect the needs of the common good. The importance of collective action was one of the most important themes to emerge from the interviews, and it was highlighted in Time magazine's comments on the inclusion of Ostrom in their list of most influential people of 2012 (see chapter 5, p.116). The commons embody collective action; the commons *are* collective action; they resist enclosure and demand the right of collective access. Unpolluted air, knowledge, the radio spectrum and even silence (Illich 1983) are all commons to which access needs profound rethinking, as much as land, city pavements and water.

Movements to 'reclaim' and to 'occupy' express the desire and the intent to establish access to a physical or nonphysical space to which access has been denied. Hence we can describe the struggle for the commons as a struggle over access, and we can call what we are seeing globally in the growing concepts of the commons in all spheres of life, that provide a uniting discourse for many diverse instances of activism and protest, a revolution in the terms of access. Presenting this trend as a question of access brings into focus global concerns over the supply of resources for meeting the basic needs of a growing world population – oil and other fuels, clean water, food – and diverse local and particularised concerns, both major components of this research. It is this reshaping of the terms of access that will allow the commons to play a profound role in re-ordering cultural and political issues (Bollier (2007(i)).

Access to resources is the concern of national governments, and the main actors are international corporations, together forming part of a hegemonic alliance. It is also the concern of intergovernmental bodies such as the UN, as well as of many NGOs and activists often concerned with the measures taken by governments and corporations in the global struggle over resources. Often national or global enterprise imposes itself on the local, sometimes encountering resistance; many local, particularised struggles about access are linked to global issues. This study has explored some instances of these (in chapter five), and shown that they are more than a multiplicity of events, linking them together in a greater

story about access, that has been described as reclaiming the commons. In many countries of the world, the ideal of equal, free and open access has been most evident in the provision of education and is also much heard and debated in the provision of health care. This thesis has referred to the history of the commons, as a communal system of land use gradually replaced through the centuries by the appropriative dynamics of capitalism. It has considered contemporary use of the notion of the commons in many contexts from Ostrom to Occupy, and from global environmental commons to cultural knowledge and the internet. Finally it has shown what difference our notions of the commons might make to the future and points to further research needed on the area of access.

Describing a theory of the commons brings into question, finally, for whom or for what purpose that theory would be for. This relates to the question which influenced the decisions I made about the writing of this thesis with the goal of contributing towards a better understanding of what will help us to move towards establishing greater social justice and equity through our political systems. A theory of the commons serves this purpose. How we share or compete for access to resources is fundamentally what politics is about. A theory of the commons has as its purpose equity, through the development of systems for sharing access to the resources of human knowledge and culture, and for sharing and sustaining the natural resources of the planet. The future is always being shaped in the present. As the struggle to reclaim the commons continues, activists and others create a discourse for a new politics whose goal is an equitable and sustainable system of sharing access to limited environmental resources, as well as to the unlimited resources of human knowledge. Seeking to prevent the dynamics of capitalism from taking control of all access to resources serves a dual purpose: to enshrine fair and equal rights of access; and to protect the resource itself from destruction or diminishment.

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Appendix: Interview Recordings

Pete Marsden
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https://dl.dropbox.com/s/5opmfjs4b2w6kmp/C7AD1FFC-D25A-4F1B-820C-9BEA128D048D_3.m4a

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https://dl.dropbox.com/s/ecc2ugud8lqvi3e/C7AD1FFC-D25A-4F1B-820C-9BEA128D048D_5.m4a

https://dl.dropbox.com/s/8j5gucik1gx2s01/C7AD1FFC-D25A-4F1B-820C-9BEA128D048D_6.m4a

Judith Hannah
https://dl.dropbox.com/s/qnjvibm6uui6kt5/2ED37E14-B6D2-4B39-91F0-41DFF02776CC_2.m4a

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Sam Halvorsen
https://dl.dropbox.com/s/jtppz3a7zq2yrwj/E8F42C86-2147-4D07-A7C8-CCBCF37FDE60_0.m4a

Dave Morris
https://dl.dropbox.com/s/00ewha0y0n8chik/88CF43E8-8C24-4AFA-9213-1EA8073C93C8_0.m4a

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Miriam Rose
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https://dl.dropbox.com/s/gy85p296daek2md/1CA08ADD-1B43-4B59-87A0-37EE517DEE9C_1.m4a

Pamela Harding
https://dl.dropbox.com/s/gcuovbcx5e5lyot/649FBEE6-3976-4F5B-8FD2-D5586B33B8E1_0.m4a

Danny Balla
https://dl.dropbox.com/s/j8kbytd5501afpo/16727270-76B5-4A58-AF69-816595689660_0.m4a