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Resilience Through Relocalization: Ecocultures of Transition?

Transition to a post-carbon, post-consumer society: new, traditional and alternative ways of living in the 'adjacent possible'.

Stephen Quilley

The Ecocultures Programme at the University of Essex is a cross-disciplinary research initiative which examines what it means to be a 'sustainable community', how sustainable communities maintain social-ecological resilience, and how we can transfer lessons from these communities to improve 'mainstream' policy and practice.

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Author contact details:

arlojem@gmail.com

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Resilience Through Relocalization: Ecocultures of Transition?

Transition to a post-carbon, post-consumer society: new, traditional and alternative ways of living in the 'adjacent possible'.

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Abstract

The paper provides an overview of the Transition movement, exploring the relationship between the positive bottom-up approach to capacity building and the ontology of civilizational collapse. As a vision of the good life, Transition is seen as an attempt by typically liberal, cosmopolitan and connected individuals to parachute into smaller, face-to-face, place-bound communities with greater capacity for resilience in uncertain times. The psychological structures and belief systems characteristic of complex 'gesellschaftlich' societies are contrasted with those implied by the project of relocalisation. The 'perverse resilience' of existing food provisioning and manufacturing systems is explored as an obstacle to the emergence of more resilient systems at lower spatial scales. Using the evocative phrase the 'great reskilling', Transition successfully articulates the kind of technologies, knowledge and skills which will have value for a post-fossil fuel, more localised economy – a world made by hand. The Transition skills agenda also taps into a wider current of disaffection with meaningless consumerism and a resurgence of interest in both traditional crafts and the 'maker' approach to technology exemplified by the culture of 'hacking.' However, this counterculture notwithstanding, the 'prefigurative' Transition skill-set is miniscule relative to the overall scale of the economy and the prospective needs of relocalized economies. There are real challenges to re-creating it from scratch, particularly in advance of any structural collapse, in the absence of local demand and in competition with the conventional economy. The paper goes on to discuss the social, political and cultural obstacles to the project of resilience through relocalization, the problem of scale in constructing Transition communities and the tension between mobilising effective we-identities without abandoning liberal and cosmopolitan emphasis on diversity and tolerance. Finally it is suggested that given the degree of systemic interdependence, the vision of local, community-level resilience must be married with a broader strategy for transforming global production systems.

1. Transition: An Overview

“Production of cheap, abundant fossil fuels is peaking and will soon be withering away... Around the world, numerous sovereign governments are close to becoming dysfunctional -- likely with very bad consequences. We are pumping so much of the wrong kinds of gases into the atmosphere that the poles are melting, the seas are rising, the land is drying out and some day soon this planet is going to be very tough to live on. “ [Tom Whipple Jan 22 2009 Falls Church News-Press]

First developed in Kinsale, Ireland in 2005, Transition is community-level response to the threats of climate change and peak oil pioneered by Rob Hopkins and summarised in *The Transition Handbook* (2008) and also *The Transition Network: Who We are and What we Do* (Lipman and Hopkins 2009; see also Brangwyn and Hopkins 2008). A permaculture educator, Hopkins worked with students in Kinsale to try and envision a positive, community-led strategy for 'energy descent' – a paradigm shift towards a low-carbon, solar powered civilisation operating self-consciously within the limits to growth associated with the ecological-economic concept of 'natural capital'. Transition is an attempt to flesh out what Howard Odum referred to as 'a prosperous way down' (Odum & Odum 2001). The first 'official' Transition Town initiative was established in Totnes (Devon, England) in 2006, and since then the growth of the movement has been rapid with approaching 200 initiatives in the UK and hundreds more in over forty countries around the world, albeit mainly in Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Canada (see Seyfang, 2009; Seyfang and Hazelton 2010; Goldwasser 2009).

With roots in the theory and practice of permaculture (Mollinson and Holmgren 1978), the origins of the movement go right back to the oil shocks of the 1970s. The practical philosophy of Transition draws implicitly on: limits to growth thinking (Meadows et al 1972; Odum 1971, 2007); the steady state concept associated with Ecological Economics (Daly and Farley 2004); the appropriate technology movement; the philosophy of self-actualising creativity associated with Ivan Illich (1971; 1973); and Schumacher's Buddhist economics with its insistence that 'small is beautiful' (1975). Transition is very much the inheritor of the alternative living movement which for thirty years has critiqued consumer-capitalism by practising disengagement and the development of an off-grid, parallel mode of living, below the radar of modern engineering, economic and regulatory systems.

At the same time, the emphasis on place-bound social and ecological community is clearly an attempt to embody the precepts of bioregional integrity associated with deep ecology (Snyder 1995; Sale 1985) and further back insights promulgated by Lewis Mumford but derived from the milieu of Patrick Geddes, Reclus and Kropotkin and others (Welter, 2003). This is evident, for instance, in the use of concepts like 'food-shed' (after watershed) in the *Can Totnes and District Feed Itself* report (Hopkins et al 2009). Possibly unconsciously, Hopkins' manual for energy descent draws heavily on a century of insightful critique based on the recognition that the 'party' of petro-capitalism could not last forever; that the illusion of 'weightlessness' and of the annihilation of distance ('space time compression') would evaporate as the hyper-mobility of goods, people and information in abstract space would once again become subordinate to the history, geography and resources of specific places; and that eventually human beings would become once again dependent on the social and ecological communities of their immediate surroundings.

What is distinctive is the way that Transition marries the climate change imperative that we *should* change our energy intensive lifestyles, to the peak oil premise that we will have *no choice*. One way or another, relocalization is inevitable. Whilst supporting national and multilateral efforts to reduce emissions and to develop new energy technologies and infrastructures, Transition leaves climate change protest to environmental campaigning groups, NGOs and activists oriented towards a global civil society. Acknowledging the need for 'government and business responses [to climate change and peak oil] at all

levels', the role of Transition is to "create [a] sense of anticipation, elation and a collective call to adventure" that will prepare the way for more directly political action at the level of national government (Hopkins 2008: 15). As Bailey et al (2008: 598) argue:

Emphasising local action ... allows relocalizers and other survivalists to avoid having to persuade politicians to redesign economic systems whilst simultaneously appealing to grassroots supporters in order to create momentum for broader political and economic reforms

To a great extent there is a persistent hedging of bets, since "much of what we would need to do to prepare for the Collapse scenarios we would need to do anyway to prepare for the Evolution scenarios" (Hopkins, 2008: 45). In many respects, Transition takes resource and/or environmentally caused geo-political conflict, for granted. Rather than campaigning against globalisation or in favour of a 'globalisation from below', the Transition project is premised on the end globalisation and the inevitability of environmentally-induced socio-economic and political disorder. Thus although Transition eschews the 'doomers' discourse of many peak oil forums,¹ *The Transition Handbook* does refer to 'burn out', 'collapse' and 'overshoot' as scenarios that are likely to play out in the absence of a "planned and urgent energy descent" (2008: 49).² And whether the end of the current global order takes the form of a planned energy descent or a chaotic implosion, "the time for seeing globalisation as an invincible and unassailable behemoth, or localisation as some kind of lifestyle choice, is over" (p.15) and "Small is inevitable" (p. 68). But at the same time Transition transforms the survivalist discourse of North American peak oil community, arguing that positive, up-lifting visions of a more convivial post-oil future are more likely to induce active participation and behavioural change: "the Transition approach [demonstrates that] the future with less oil could be preferable to the present" (p. 53); "Our best chance of a successful collective transition will not come from presenting people with the possibility of [collapse/disintegration] scenarios" (p. 49).

If the purpose of Transition is 'to support community-led responses to peak oil and climate change, building resilience and happiness' (Hopkins and Lipman, 2009: 7), the overarching strategy is to provide people with good information, and to trust people and [by an emergent process] communities to make good decisions. Messages are resolutely non-judgemental, non-directive, and respectful of differing emotional, physical and economic capacities to engage. Transition places great store in principles of inclusivity, diversity and openness, insisting that 'there is, in the challenge of energy descent, no room for 'them and us' thinking' (Hopkins and Lipman 2009: 8). In many ways this positive dimension of Transition can be regarded as a real world example of Homer Dixon's argument for the *Upside of Down* (Homer-Dixon, 2006).

Another distinctive feature of the movement is the overt recognition of psychology and trauma both in its theory and strategy of behavioural change and the way in which it tries to accommodate the strain and pressure on activists. Eschewing the institutional politics of political parties and also the confrontational orientation of environmental activism, Transition is predicated on bottom up, networking, collaboration and community engagement. Recognising also the intricate web of social and psychological dependency through which we are all implicated and compromised by living in a higher energy consumer society, Transition draws attention to the potential for denial or psychological trauma. Drawing on an addiction model of energy dependency (Diclemente 2003), resilience is understood in relation to an 'inner' as well as an 'outer' Transition.

¹ See LATOC <http://www.lifeaftertheoilcrash.net/> or for a more extreme take on Malthus <http://dieoff.org/> the 'population crash page'.

²Drawing on Four Energy Scenarios by Bryn Davidson (www.dynamiccities.squaresspace.com), Hopkins refers to Jared Diamond's *Collapse* and *Overshoot*, William Catton's classic Malthusian take on sustainability and carrying capacity.

In contrast to most other groups concerned with sustainability, Transition cannot be described as a protest movement. Strictly speaking it operates at a tangent to mainstream climate politics or more well established environmental organisations. With an orientation that is resolutely non-confrontational, Transition communities are seeking to take charge of their own destinies and to develop *re-localisation* strategies – initiatives which ‘pre-figure’ or anticipate what is seen to be an inevitable reversal of globalisation. Thus, in many important respects the Transition movement is an example of practical, solutions-orientated ‘sustainable communities’ in the making. Those involved in the Transition movement, while not apolitical or against political activity, do nevertheless represent a decisive ‘pragmatic turn’ as it were within the politics of the transition to sustainability. Focusing as it does on very practical issues such as skills/re-skilling, food, energy, transport, land use and cultivation and above all community building, Transition is a form of hands-on DIY politics which involves actual transformation of local communities and preparing them practically for the adapting to the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change i.e. creating communities with the practical capacity to be resilient in the face of these externally generated shocks over which local communities have little control. Metaphorically one can view Transition as a strategy of ‘circling the wagons’ as local communities learn, practice and experiment their way towards creating a more sustainable future for themselves, without waiting on the state or some other outside agency to come and help them. To continue the analogy, Transition initiatives are not waiting for ‘the cavalry’ to come riding over the hill to rescue them and ‘give them’ resilience. Transition initiatives are examples of local communities ‘doing sustainability for themselves’ on the basis of their own localised understanding of what ‘sustainability’ means.

From a ‘peak oil’ perspective, increased material and transportations costs resulting from energy shortfalls will guarantee a massive reduction in global and national flows of people, goods and (perhaps most critically) information (Heinberg 2005; Kunstler 2005, 2008; Strahan 2007; McBay 2007; Deffreyes 2005). In the long term this chronic energy shock will engender a much more localised ‘bio-regional’ pattern of economic production and consumption. Recognising the trajectory of our current fossil fuel energy path, Transition initiatives seek to enhance the *resilience* of local communities, increasing their capacity to navigate economic and environmental crises. Actively anticipating the changes needed to survive peak oil, Transition initiatives seek to engender behavioural and structural change at the level of families and communities which places a high premium on the reduction of emissions and the adoption of more eco-cyclical patterns of economic behaviour. For Transition advocates, responding to climate change and peak oil involves an integrated and seamless transformation of family, community and economic life – a paradigm shift captured by the notions of ‘re-localisation’ and the creation of ‘sustainable communities’.

2. Transition and Civilization: Diagnosis, Prognosis, Discourse

Framed by the burgeoning literatures of catastrophic climate change (Lovelock 2007,2009; Hansen 2011, Pearce 2007, 2008; Lynas 2007; Rees 2004) and peak oil (Heinberg 2005, Kunstler 2005), Transition is firmly rooted within an ontology of overshoot and collapse (Greer). Recent academic contributions (Diamond 2006; Homer-Dixon 2006) build on thirty years of transdisciplinary research grounded in ecological economics (Daly 2004) and ecology (Odum, 1971; Catton 1980) but with important contributions from the social sciences (Tainter, 1988; Heilbrunner 1974; Ophuls 1992, 1998). Although representing a literate and educated constituency (Seyfang 2009), it is not true that ordinary Transitioners are well-versed in the details of these academic debates. Nevertheless, they do share and absorb a set of premises, concepts and terms which could fairly be described as a ‘discourse’ – framing

and colouring perceptions of the world.³ At the heart of this diagnosis are a number of premises and propositions:

- (i.) Long term processes of human development have involved extensive and intensive growth, and steadily rising energy and material throughput.
- (ii.) Human economy and society evolved from and are a subset of the biosphere. Nevertheless there to the extent that there are limits to available land, energy, and materials - the relationship between the biosphere and the 'anthroposphere' (Goudsblom 2002) is a zero-sum. Since the human economy is dependent on the energy and material cycles of the biosphere, there are quite clearly, as Herman Daly points out, limits to growth and a maximum scale beyond which the economy cannot grow. This is the fundamental proposition of ecological economics.
- (iii.) Driven by fossil fuels, modernization and global integration have unleashed mutually reinforcing and explosive patterns of population growth, technological innovation, economic growth and rising levels of per capita consumption.
- (iv.) The scale of the global economy is now unsustainable. Continuing expansion is causing irreparable (at least within human time-frames) damage to the self-organizing systems of the biosphere. Ecological crisis combined with energy and material resource constraints (Heinberg 2005; 2007) make a collapse of global civilization and traumatic decline in population likely or inevitable.
- (v.) Personal, familial and community resilience to these converging catastrophes is best served by enhancing the economic, cultural and ecological ties of place-bound, communities.

3. Austerity and conflict or 'the Good Life'

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

--Reinhold Niebuhr

In this entropic or ecological-economic critique of civilization, there is a sobering tension between democratic civility and the humanity of civilization on the one hand and limits to growth on the other.

Certainly, in the course of human development general there is a systematic and positive relationship between social complexity and throughput: greater throughput, bigger economy, more social complexity. It follows that civilisational attributes that are commonly associated with 'the good society' – cosmopolitanism, justice, individual freedom, social liberalism, democracy, global institutions and norms, human rights, the socio-psychological process of individuation etc. – are not ecologically neutral but come at an environmental cost, which at least in principle could be measured.⁴ All of the taken-for-granted paraphernalia of liberal societies emerged in tandem

³ This discourse is well represented by the numerous blogs carried by the Energy Bulletin [www.energybulletin.net] – a peak oil/climate change news digest run by the Post-Carbon Institute and affiliated to the Transition Network. 'Featured content' includes postings from Richard Heinberg, Rob Hopkins, Jim Kunstler, Sharon Astyk, Dave Cohen [ASPO], Herman Daly, John Michael Greer, Paul Kingsnorth, Bill Dmitry Orlov, Tom Whipple and many more. Ecologist Paul Chefurka provides a rather typical example: "We are now well into a global crisis that may mark the end of this cycle of human civilization" [<http://www.paulchefurka.ca/> -- July 8th 2011].

⁴ Howard T Odum provides the most sophisticated analysis, locating information and cultural artefacts at the highest levels of transformity, a measure of energy transformation in a universal/cosmic energy hierarchy (See Odum 2007).

with modernizing capitalist growth economies (Quilley 2011). As Moyn (2010) has argued, the universal concept of 'human rights' was only coined in English in the 1940s and did not become the pervasive global frame and orientation for politics we now take for granted, until the 1970s and 1980s. It is perhaps not accidental that this period was also the apogee of petro-capitalism. Liberalism is strongly associated with high and expanding throughput. In a rather profound sense, ecological integrity is inversely proportional to civilization. So whilst there is a minimum throughput/economic scale for a functioning global-liberal society, there is also a maximum scale for biosphere integrity. We simply do not know how much room for maneuver there may be between the two.

In the peak oil literature this is sometimes very explicit. For instance, in James Kunstler's literary depiction of post-collapse America, there is no room for gender equality or democracy. Small town, agrarian society reverts back to a kind of feudalism (2008). In the numerous peak-oil related blogs, the future is routinely presented as a bleak Hobbesian struggle for survivalism and there is an overt referencing of the kind of gun-toting survivalism associated with James Wesley Rawles [<http://www.survivalblog.com/> -- written for 'prepared individuals living in uncertain times']. But even more reasonable analysts such as John Michael Greer (2007) do not flinch in exploring the social and political consequences of civilizational contraction.

But although Transition emerged directly from this framing of civilizational collapse, the movement remains trenchantly opposed to any kind of survivalist mentality. Great Britain and particularly England, is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. It has no real wilderness areas and no hills to which would be survivalists might retreat in times of 'uncertainty.' It is also hard to imagine developing a form of domestic, social or community life outside of the purview of the extensive institutions of state. In this context, Rob Hopkins' Transition formula is relentless optimistic, non-ideological and focused on enhancing the economic capacities and sufficiency of local communities. Rather than depict any kind of Mad Max future of chaos and violent conflict over resources, Transition is deliberately agnostic about the geopolitics, war or the relevance of national economic and political organizations. These things are outside of the remit and influence of ordinary people who are best advised to concentrate on the sphere of local community and economy and measures which enhance local resilience.

Here is a tension at the heart of Transition – a thermodynamic-ecological critique which makes civilizational collapse seem unavoidable and a continual denial of the likely political and human consequences of collapse. In the event of any collapse, small-scale food and energy projects such as planting nut trees in Totnes would certainly be overwhelmed by proximity of 10 million hungry people in Greater London. But at the core of Transition strategy is an eschewal of any 'doomer' mentality or scenario and the insistence on the cumulative and paradigm transforming power of small changes. With a positivism and perhaps wisdom which recalls Reinhold Niebuhr's serenity prayer, social entrepreneurs in the Transition Network focus relentlessly on community capacity building. Relocalization involves building up the social capital and culture of mutual aid engendered by the face-to-face relationships of economic interdependency. In the UK, building on a widespread dissatisfaction with the hollowing out of local economies, the empty shops on deserted high streets and the dull, corporate 'clone towns' (Simms et al 2005; Simms 2007) produced by out of town retail parks and heartless, autocratic planning policies. Under the banner of remembrance and the 'wisdom of elders', Transitioners use old photographs, maps and oral history to remember how community and economy functioned when fewer people had cars, everybody walked or used the bus and more food was produced locally. Envisioning and scenario planning exercise evoke future possibilities for an alternative Transition Timeline (Chamberlain, 2010) in which concerted relocalization has provided an effective cushion to trauma and disruption of climate-energy chaos. And in these alternative visions the dominant motif is that small has once

again become beautiful, with cycles and buses displacing cars, local energy and food systems displacing the national grid and global agribusiness, and community fabrication and repair supplementing a more ecologically sensitive, city-regional forms of manufacturing.

The underlying message is very clear. Transition represents what Odum and Odum referred to as the 'prosperous way down' (2001). Energy descent will mean much lower levels of consumption, but more meaningful human relationships, a less alienated relationship with artisanal production and a more ecologically sustainable relationship to local landscape and place. In short, the vista presented by Transition is for enhanced community cohesion and harmony and greater individual happiness. In short, rather than austerity and conflict, Transition presents a vision of the good life.

4. Transition as an Eco-culture and Community

Unlike the other case-studies in this series, Transition doesn't pertain to a pre-existing, established community. It is rather an attempt to use self-conscious community-making as a response to systemic crisis – a perceived crisis of civilization.

In Transition discourse, peak oil determines that small is not only beautiful but inevitable. In this sense, relocalization anticipates a momentous turning point in global history. For over 1000 years starting in Europe processes of socio-economic development and nation-state formation have seen a steady increase in the size of human survival units and the territorial integration of political, cultural and economic life (Elias 2000). At various points this process accelerated on the back of new sources of energy and materials – notably with the opening up of the New World from 1492 and coal-fired industrialisation in England in the 18th century (Schandl and Krausmann, 2007; Fischer-Kowalski & Haberl 2007; see also Goudsloot 2003a). This entropic view of civilization and civilization is completely consistent with the catastrophist versions of peak oil (Duncan 2005).

Although sociologists of modernity focus on the emergence of industrial capitalism at the end of the 18th century, 'modernisation' is better seen as the accelerated tail of a much longer process of expansion, continuous since the post-Roman re-emergence of Europe (Bloch 1989; Braudel 1981). A characteristic feature of this process of expansion has always been the overlaying of secondary relationships and interdependencies over the primary relationships of kinship and place. Places get bigger. The scale of economic trade expands. Cultural influences become more diffuse and pervasive. Conscious and unconscious dependence on known and unknown individuals and social groups increases. In his far-reaching study *The Civilizing Process* (2012 [1939]) Elias famously linked the rising intensity of such invisible ties of interdependence and the emergence of markets and more effective state institutions over larger territories, with the internalisation of psychological constraints and more encompassing patterns of socialisation.

But if modernity is continuous with a much longer process of expansion and integration, the period of capitalist internationalisation since the 18th century has been distinctive if only for the enormously accelerated pace of change. Driven by a one-off bounty of fossil fuel, social relations at the start of the 21st century are fantastically fluid and mediated by historical standards. An important dimension of this has been the process of individuation, whereby individuals have been gradually disembedded from the ascriptive ties of kinship, occupation and geography. Individuation has become the unseen, automatic premise of politics (from *The Rights of Man* to the UN declaration of universal human rights), of economics (Homo economicus and the all-powerful consumer), of culture, of law and just about every other field of endeavour. Modernity is the first social context in which questions like 'Who am I? Who is the real me? What could I become?' have

become meaningful for wider circles of people. Starting with the ascending bourgeois classes of Western Europe, this process has reached down (and up) across the social classes and increasingly drives social transformations in what were traditional agrarian societies across Asia and the global south. Combined with the emergence of the intermediate category of 'young adult' and youth culture as a meaningful demographic, the cult of individual identity and expression has underpinned a wide variety of social and cultural movements from feminism, civil rights and gay liberation to rock 'n roll and modern art.

It is now necessary to make a small digression, the significance of which will become apparent. Somewhat paradoxically, behind all of this dazzling diversity has been the emergence of consumerism and the consumer society. The invention by Edward Bernay [and John B Watson] of modern public relations and psychological marketing was a significant instance of social innovation (Westley 2008) in which a suite of new marketing technologies were developed by capturing and exploiting the newly discovered phenomenon of the Freudian unconscious.⁵

In Freud's model, the architecture of the human psyche includes a significant 'unconscious' component (the 'id'), a storehouse of instinctual desires, needs, and psychic actions which, though unavailable to our conscious minds (the 'ego'), has a significant impact in driving neurotic and instinctual behaviour and is regulated by a parallel unconscious 'superego' mechanism. By making use of the store of affective and emotional associations at the level of the id, the unconscious mind can be manipulated for therapeutic [or economic, political, social] effect.

Psychological marketing techniques based on the power of emotional and affective association were deployed quite deliberately with a view to solving simultaneously, two problems facing nascent liberal-industrial democracies.

a.) By shifting the dynamics of purchasing from need to desire, the new 'consumptionist regime' opened the vista of permanent economic expansion and growth rooted in consumer fashions, short life cycle products and in-built obsolescence. Along with changes in the fiscal-welfare system, unionisation and high-wages, the culture of consumerism was a key mechanism in allowing mass production to be sustained by mass consumption. Consumerism resolved the Keynesian problem of over-production.

b.) At the same time, consumerism also addressed a perceived weakness at the heart of liberal democratic states. At the end of his life in *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud presented his pessimistic view that the productivity and creativity of complex societies was bought at the necessary cost of psychological repression, achieved by the enhanced constraining influence of the super-ego. Civilization, he argued, was a thin veneer and any failure of this generalised repressive apparatus could give free-reign to violent and dangerous forces in the unconscious. The participation of ordinary Germans in mass killings and genocide seemed to confirm Freud's nightmare scenario. Psychological studies (undertaken with the help of psychoanalysts) on American soldiers suffering from trauma during and after the war seemed also to confirm the reality of dangerous unconscious feelings and emotions. In the moment of its greatest triumph after the War, this realisation presented the liberal establishment with a dilemma. It seemed that liberal

⁵ This discussion owes much to Adam Curtis's BBC documentary *The Century of the Self* – which itself drew on Stuart Ewan's *Captains of Consciousness. Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (1976, New York: McGraw-Hill). See also Vance Packard's (1957) *The Hidden Persuaders*. Although Curtis and Ewan both focus on Edward Bernays, Anna Freud and psychoanalytical tradition it is also true that JB Watson was also highly influential on the early advertising industry. Although applying insights from behaviourism which certainly does not recourse to any concept of the unconscious, the practical import of Watson's work with the J Walter Thompson Ad. Agency was very similar to that of Bernays: namely to avoid cognitive information-led approaches and focus on the emotions and feelings evoked by products.

democratic institutions – premised as they are on rational, well-integrated individuals – were inherently unstable. Once again, developing insights drawn from his uncle, Freud's nephew Edward Bernays advanced a high-minded but cynical solution. Free-thinking citizens could be controlled and regulated by their diverting anti-social, irrational and potentially pathological and insatiable feelings to the immediate gratifications of mass consumption. Bernays' *The Engineering of Consent* (1947) and *Manipulating Public Opinion: The Why and the How* (1928) explicitly recommended the wholesale reconstruction of citizens as pacified consumers. Satiation was possible through permanent consumption, which became the equivalent of the opiate 'soma' in Huxley's *Brave New World*. In post-war America large parts of the American elite bought into this diagnosis and solution quite explicitly, recruiting both Anna Freud Edward Bernays and others to advise on a variety of foreign and domestic policy issues.

So from the mid-20th century, mass consumption on the back of permanent economic growth provide the foundation for modern Western society not only because it resolves the Keynesian problem of effective demand, but also because it addresses the Freudian problem of psychic regulation and restraint.

Of course the most dangerous 'pathology' that worried the establishment was 'communism' – the fear that free-thinking citizens might vote for restrictions on property rights, greater intervention in the operation of the market, or even wholesale nationalization. Never-the-less, while 'the long boom' was in full swing, critics of this new socio-psycho-economic compact [e.g. Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*] found themselves at the margins of political life. For decades after their failures in Italy and Germany following the World War I, Western Marxists such as Gramsci, Karl Korsch and the Frankfurt School had asked how it was that capitalism proved to be so durable. Caught between the Charybdis of Auschwitz and the Scylla of shallow, Californian consumerism, Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) came close to echoing Freud's own despair and set the tone for post-war critics. By the early 1960s it had become apparent that mammon rather than simply ideology or false-consciousness has become the mainstay of capitalist hegemony. The Western working classes really had, as Macmillan put it to British workers in 1957, 'never had it so good', and they knew it – up to a point. Certainly there was alienation and resentment, but all that consumption, contraception and rock 'n roll was also fun.

One ironic consequence of this deep-seated and iterative relationship between individualization, the social architecture of liberal democracies and capitalist consumer society was that critical counter-cultural movements have invariably become enmeshed in the logic of consumerism. It is almost impossible for the compulsive urge for self-expression not to find voice in the world of throwaway commodities and fashion (Ask any punk!). This has of course long been recognized by radicals and critics of many persuasions. However, it is not just that identity-based politics can be subverted by consumption. The very existence of the individualism upon which any kind of liberal cosmopolitanism sensibility depends, emerged only in the wake of the capitalist division of labour. Even if it were possible to change the social relations of production, it would be impossible to sustain the current level of social complexity without a broadly similar level of material and energy throughput. Individuality takes up a great deal of ecological space – period!

The difficulty of a 'low energy cosmopolitanism' has been alluded to above. However it has important ramifications for the politics of Transition. The fact that that the movement has gone viral and spread into hundreds of communities across more than forty countries is certainly impressive. But it also points to a sociological paradox. The discourse of relocalization is all about re-discovering and even rebuilding the place-bound, ecologically-rooted and face-to-face 'communities of fate' i.e. to engender the solidarity and cohesiveness that we associate with what Ferdinand Tönnies called 'gemeinschaft'. The irony is that if ever there was a 'community of choice' it is the Transition Network. Making full use of the internet, mobile telephony and a global publishing industry

accessed through Amazon, Transition is a movement of liberal, highly educated cosmopolitans with left-liberal political inclinations and a strong attachment to the institutions of liberal-social democracies. That Rob Hopkins has given up flying and committed himself to Totnes is a commendable placement of money with mouth – but the fact that it is commendable is indicative of the fact that it was a choice. It is also true that the Network has found it easier to spread laterally between communities than to scale-up significant economic and social influence within communities.

In a perceptive if polemical book *Language and Solitude*, Ernest Gellner argued that *Gemeinschaft* communities with strongly developed, place-bound ‘we identities’ emerged as identifiable entities only in response to the stresses of modernisation – only as the converse of the rampant *Gesellschaft* of expanding capitalist society. The ‘rootedness’ and organic connection to place was certainly a feature of traditional, agrarian communities but not consciously, not as a focus for identity – not until the fluid, placeless culture of commerce was sufficiently autonomous as to provide an alternative vision of social life. These poles of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* became the dominant epistemological and ontological frames through which intellectuals viewed the chaotic dislocations of pell-mell modernisation. In the words of Steven Lukes

These various elements are ‘aligned’ with one another, forming ‘two poles of looking, not merely at knowledge, but at human life’ and ‘the tension between them is one of the deepest and most pervasive themes in modern thought’. The ‘two poles’ are given a variety of labels. One is the ‘atomic-universalist individualist vision’, beginning with Descartes and Robinson Crusoe, typified by Hume and Kant, and reformulated by Ernst Mach and Bertrand Russell. It is variously identified with empiricism, rationalism and positivism, and with *Gesellschaft*, with economic markets and political liberalism, and bloodless cosmopolitanism. The other is the ‘communal-cultural vision’, the organic counter-picture, first lived and practised unreflectively, then articulated by Herder and by countless ‘romantic organicists’, ‘nationalist populists’ and ‘romantic rightists’, stressing totality, system, connectedness, particularism, cultural specificity, favouring *Gemeinschaft*, roots, ‘closed, cosy’ communities, *Blut und Boden*. The ‘alignment’ of the elements within these poles and the tension between them was especially strong in the Habsburg lands, not least Poland and Austria, as the Empire reached its end, where ‘the confrontation of atomists and organicists. . . meshes in with the alliances and hatreds of daily and political life’. (Steven Lukes, in his Forward to Gellner 1998: xxiii-xxiv)

Transition is quite clearly a product of *Gesellschaft*. It is an increasingly global network of like-minded individuals who share a common diagnosis of ecological and social crisis, rooted in science. The *Gemeinschaft* evoked by the Nazi slogan of ‘*blut und boden*’ implies a relationship between kinship, culture and ecological place – an intergenerational connection to ecological systems known through an array of productive activities or what Ingold describes as a ‘taskscape (2000: 1-4).⁶’ With Transition Network activists, the connection to nature is typically abstract, informed by ecological science and an urban aesthetic of landscape. Emphatically apolitical, Transition firmly rejects the cheap rallying cries of separatism and communalism, and distances itself from any logic of survivalism. Like many social movements with an educated liberal, urban demographic, the Network is probably in most cases

⁶ Ingold uses Bruegel’s painting *The Harvesters* to develop the idea of a taskscape – to a spatial array and temporal sequence of ‘dwelling activities’ which structure landscape and structuring both the ecology and experience of place. The historic network of footpaths testifies to activities unfolding over generations – the ‘taskscape made visible’. (2000: 1-4)

disproportionately white and middle class. But in line with their liberal-left roots, this is a matter of concern and there has been considerable discussion of the importance of diversity and democracy at the annual conferences in England and in the electronic forums (e.g. Rayner 2009). Similarly despite the very clear sexual division of labour which might be seen to be inherent in the vision of homesteading sufficiency, the Network is clearly feminist and egalitarian in nature and, at least in the most public debates, there is an overt concern not to abandon or lose the gains made by women for parity, esteem and political power.

This presents quite an interesting problem in terms of the political sociology of the movement. In attempting to prefigure 'a world made by hand' Transitioners are attempting to parachute into smaller-face-to-face, place-bound survival communities. The promulgation of the Network has depended on the communication and information-technology skills of an educated, mobile and cosmopolitan cadre of social entrepreneurs and the viral spread of the movement, particularly through the Anglophone world, is a testament to depth of this *Gesellschaftlich* skill-set. In short, as social entrepreneurs, Transition activists excel in those activities, technologies and psychological dispositions that underpin global capitalism.

However moving from the establishment of a Transition Initiative involving a small number of like-minded individuals and undertaking a limited number of small-scale food and energy-related projects, to the coalescence of tightly bound 'communities of fate' at the scale of whole villages, towns or even cities and bioregions requires something much more problematic. Such a transformation might well happen quickly in the wake of systemic collapse i.e.) if the structural ties of economic and cultural interdependency with the hyper-connected world of global capitalism are severed from without, as it were. But for hundreds of individuals to leap into this small, limited world of constraint voluntarily, in anticipation of what might happen is less plausible. The structures of the conventional economy and state institutions are monopolistic and make it difficult for the structures of a relocalized economy and society to take root. Even in Totnes, the birthplace of the movement, the embryonic relocalized sector accounts for a miniscule proportion of the energy, goods and services which flow through the local economy. And alongside this structural problem there is the psycho-social problem of moving from the open, connected, fluid, individuated modes of identity formation associated with choice and mobility to the more closed, ascriptive, primary modes of we-group identification associated with *Gemeinschaft*. The very notion of 'choosing' to adopt a *gemeinschaftlich* mode of association and identification is a contradictory. To the extent that such a choice is possible in the modern world, it would likely be associated be in the context of regressive far-right and religious forms of communalism, directed explicitly against outsider groups. Where such movements are successful in modern societies, they tend to take root in the context of place-bound communities which already have exclusive we-group identifications organised around social class, religion or ethnicity. Remaining true to the liberal and egalitarian precepts of social inclusion and individual freedom, and only weakly connected to existing communities, Transition is unlikely to provide an effective focus for any kind of regressive togetherness.

5. Transition Skills

Transition envisages a difficult transformation to a smaller, less complex, post-fossil fuel economy. In the near-future, community resilience in the face of rapid ecological, economic and social shocks will depend on re-learning old skills and knowledge sets. Because it depends very much on 'the great reskilling', the vision of resilience through relocalization suggests a radical reorientation of both formal and informal systems of education – from schools right through to universities. Reflecting on the notion of Transition skills, New Zealand Transitioner Michael O'Brian (2009) came up with a list of two hundred artisan crafts that were required to make a Victorian town function effectively. Here are a few:

- *Woodland Crafts.* Coppicers, hurdle makers, rake makers, fork makers, besom makers, handle makers, hoop makers, ladder makers, crib makers, broaches and peg makers, clog sole cutters, bodgers, charcoal burners, oak basket makers, trug makers, stick and staff makers, field gate makers, willow basket makers, net makers.
- *Building crafts.* Stone masons, joiners, roofers, floor layers, wallers, thatchers, slaters, lime burners, paint makers, glass blowers, glaziers, stained glass artists, mud brick makers, tile makers, chimney sweeps, plumbers, decorators, bridge builders, French polishers, sign writers.
- *Field crafts.* Hedge layers, dry stone wallers, stile makers, well diggers, peat cutters, gardeners, horticulturists, vintners, arborists, tree surgeons, foresters, farmers, shepherds, shearers, bee keepers, millers, fishermen, orchardists, veterinarians.
- *Workshop crafts.* Chair makers, iron founders, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, coopers, coppersmiths, tinsmiths, wood turners, coach builders, boat builders, sail makers, rope makers, wainwrights, block makers, leather tanners, harness makers, saddlers, horse collar makers, boot and shoe makers, cobblers, clog makers, knife makers, cutters, millstone dressers, potters, printers, typographers, calligraphers, bookbinders, paper makers, furniture makers, jewellers, mechanics, boiler makers, boiler men, soap makers, gunsmith, sword smith, brush maker, candle maker, artist, sculptor, firework maker, cycle builder, bone carver, musical instrument maker, clay pipe maker, tool maker.
- *Textile crafts.* Spinner, weaver, dyer, silk grower, tailor, seamstress, milliner, hatter, lace maker, button maker, mat and rug maker, crochet worker, tatting and macramé worker, knitter, quilter, smock worker, embroiderer, leather worker, felt maker.
- *Domestic crafts.* Fish smoker, bacon curer, butter maker, cheese maker, brewer, cider maker, wine maker, distiller, herbalist, ice cream maker, butcher, fishmonger, pie maker, pickle maker, baker, barrister and coffee roaster, homeopath, reflexologist, osteopath, naturopath, storyteller, teacher naturalist, historian, jester, actor, administrator, philosopher, labourer, poet, writer, midwife, publican, bookseller, librarian.

To these we might add a new sector – *Repair, Maintenance and Salvage* – that we might expect to feature in any imploding post-carbon economy. During the 1970s radical educationalists such as Ivan Illich often remarked on the fact that in developing countries one could always find untutored, practical and effective know-how – people who could repair radios, keep an old engine running, make, mend and salvage. If the expert systems upon which we have relied break down, we would need to rediscover this confident, practical, experimental attitude to machinery and technology – not least because for many decades we may be dependent on salvaging and reconditioning the technological detritus of the petroleum age.

Little over a century ago, most of these skill sets were part of the mainstream economy of virtually every village and town across Europe and North America. These crafts defined the technical and social division of labour. But even by the last quarter of the 19th century many were being displaced by the process of mass production and mechanization, not least on farms where steam-powered machinery began to displace agricultural labour causing an exodus of the land and changing for ever the social structure of the countryside. One hundred years later many artisanal crafts had died out completely or were reduced to a handful of aging practitioners carrying a torch for the old ways.

However, whilst they may have died out in practice most of these skills live on in our collective memory and imagination. In some ways this O'Brian's inventory – tinkers, tailors, candlestick makers, woodsmen, poachers, bodgers, wainwrights, coopers, thatchers, potters – represents checklist of occupations from canon of children's' fairy tales and folk stories. Together they refer to an integrated artisanal skill-set which intimates a civilization made by hand or with human or animal powered machinery. Some aspects of this skill-set are human universals – making and using tools, working with fire, a fine-tuned cognitive and aesthetic awareness of the natural world (albeit

severely dulled in modern societies). Others touch on a deep-seated sensibility for all agrarian civilizations. They are for the most part the traditional crafts which involve working with local renewable materials intimating, rather than detached landscape, the sense of ecological place as a 'lived in' and creatively transformed taskscape.

They involve skills, tacit knowledge sets and kinesthetic sensitivities to the subtleties of materials transmitted father to son, mother to daughter or master to apprenticeship for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years. And taken together they allow for the continual reproduction of the material culture for a quite basic, mostly-self-sufficient, village-agrarian society. The reason that they hang on in story books and Disney films is because they are about the basics of house building, crop growing, clothes-making – the stuff of everyday life for 10,000 years. They pertain to the production of objects and functionalities that we still need and use on a daily basis – such as bread, or clothes – even if the process of production has been mechanized and entirely abstracted from any observable domestic or community based activity.

Although nearly wiped out of the mainstream economy, artisanal craft skills have hung-on by a thread in the context of leisure, tourism and high-end, luxury commodities. For instance thatched roofs were ubiquitous in the United Kingdom until the early 19th century when industrial production of Welsh slate began to displace the traditional material. Over the last 30 years however, thatch has made a come back and there are up to a thousand professional thatchers and a regular turn over of apprenticeships, in an industry servicing the luxury end of the housing market. A similar revival has occurred in areas such as traditional brewing, artisanal food production, hedging, artisanal woodland management and dry-stone walling. Partly in reaction to the alienation and disaffection produced by the mass production of everyday life, there is an expanding market for commodities which are local, handmade by artisans, ecologically benign and which construct or resurrect continuities with the taskscapes of the past. In both the leisure and education sectors, there are also expanding opportunities to learn recently revived crafts – anything from bodging⁷ and long bow construction, to soap making, bushcraft, wild-food gathering and preparation and herbal medicine.

Summary:

Transition's 'reskilling' agenda taps into this revival and quite clearly the great majority of these craft activities would have value and enhance the resilience of any relocating economy. The numbers of people involved are tiny relative to the scale of the wider economy. But skills and knowledge are being maintained and revived. Intergenerational patterns of knowledge transfer are being re-established. In principle, at least in the UK, most of the technologies, knowledge and skill sets for a post-carbon, relocalized and bioregional solar economy are available, if only in embryo. However these are spread over the country as a whole and their accessibility currently depends on the functioning transport, communications and education infrastructure of the current national economy. They are not deeply rooted within particular place-bound communities, and thus far Transition has had only limited success in changing this situation.

⁷ Bodging involves working green wood, on-site in the woods, using a primitive foot operated pole lathe, to make hurdles, fence posts, chairs, tables and other bits and pieces long since replaced by mass-produced, injection molded plastic substitutes.

6. Transition and Local Food

6.1 Resurgent Food Localism

Perhaps the area where Transition has made the clearest impact is in relation to food culture. Food localism is in the air. Over the last ten years, the idea of DIY home growing and support for local producers and processors has become the default position for just about everyone involved in the food industry – even those organisations such as the multiple retailers, who are most involved with the logistical operation of the global food system. Nowhere is the paradoxical contrast between the homely discourse of self-sufficiency and community and the reality of just-in-time global sourcing more blatant than in the United Kingdom. Here, the tradition of working class food production on council allotments was for a long time the last remnant of a peasant food culture otherwise wiped out during the process of industrialisation. There was also a well-established counterculture, associated with the organic movement and led by the Soil Association, but this remained, for decades, marginal and (at least from the outside) a little eccentric. During most of the post-war period public common sense acquiesced willingly to the government agenda of cheap, plentiful food and the continuing modernisation of the food system. The perceived ‘crankiness’ and Romantic eccentricity of those who questioned the logic of agribusiness was perfectly captured by Richard Briars’ portrayal of suburban self-sufficiency nut Tom Good in ‘The Good Life’.

Forty years on, we have come a long way from ‘The Good Life’. Food localism is now a pervasive ‘common sense’ – at least as far as public pronouncements and affiliations are concerned. Here are just a few examples:

- Celebrity chefs and hobby farmers dominate the TV schedules with headline acts including Jamie Oliver, Jimmy’s Farm (amateur farmer James takes up the breeding of rare pigs), Huw Fearnley Whittingstall’s River Cottage
- Primetime celebration of wild food and self-provisioning with Ray Mears achieving a brand status.
- High profile community projects such as ‘Incredible Edible TodMorden’ – a village in Yorkshire with ‘a menu for the future’, the goal of becoming a paragon of self-sufficiency and with a wider aspiration to spread the word and engender ‘incredible edible communities everywhere.’
- School gardening projects: There are too many to count, but many take their cue from The Edible Schoolyard (ESY) – a one-acre organic garden and kitchen classroom for urban public school students at Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, California (<http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/>)
- Proliferating farmers’ markets.
- The well documented rise of the organic sector, aided by the adept public relations work of the Soil Association.
- Prime-time gardening/horticultural shows. Examples include: Monty Don rehabilitating drug addicts by exposing them to the green-fingered delights of ‘grow your own’; and Blue Peter, the long running BBC magazine programme for children which recently dug up its prized ‘Italian sunken garden’ to grow vegetables.
- Magazines (e.g. *Country Living*)
- Property shows – *Escape to the Country* – running on a loop for over a decade (always feature the desirable cottage vegetable garden)

Perhaps the most telling indication that local food and ‘grow your own’ have moved into the mainstream of public life was when Barack Obama dug up the Whitehouse lawn to plant a vegetable garden. At the same time, it is clearly not the case the Obama shares the apocalyptic view of the

Transition Network – of food self-sufficiency as insurance against an imminent energy crunch and an unavoidable relocalization of the global food system. Never-the-less, the approbation of local and home-grown food has become pervasive and it is easy to see why. The discourse of food localism speaks to a whole series of pressing politico-moral panics (Cohen 1973) and policy domains. It does this by both framing and coalescing perceived symptoms and easily understood diagnoses of social problems, whilst at the same time intimating a simple and ‘obvious’ solution.

Figure 1: Politico-Moral Panics, Policy Domains and Bio-regional Food Localism

Domain	Problem	Bio-regional food localism as a solution
<i>Health</i>	Diseases of affluence: diabetes, obesity, heart disease...caused by too much fast food, ready meals, cheap food, under-valuing of food, under-valuing of eating as a foundation of family and community life.	Quality: low/zero-pesticides, fresh, more vegetables, less/better quality meat, home-prepared
<i>Education</i>	Lack of engagement Food-related attention deficit Lack of knowledge & interest in food/health Lack of engagement between school and parents/community	Activity: gardening as healthy exercise Healthy food/healthy mind Class-room team spirit Community engagement Focus for wider curricula (history, geography, ecology, health, economics) Opportunities for working with local farms/food processors
<i>Ecology</i>	Global agribusiness model: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of reflexivity/transparency vis ecological impacts ▪ Loss of biodiversity ▪ Meat intensive ▪ High carbon (global warming) ▪ Energy intensive (vulnerable to energy shocks) 	Local eco feedback loops more direct/unmediated – greater reflexivity/responsiveness More veg. in diet Less pesticide use Biodiversity-friendly agro-ecological methods
<i>Community</i>	Lack of community integration	Food central to community [‘breaking bread’] Community re-engagement through food festivals, landshare and community farming, allotment associations
<i>Local economy</i>	Food production and processing out sourced or vulnerable to market fluctuations Competitive pressure on producers	Food economy locally embedded in direct social/community relationships, expressed in local culture (food festivals) and less vulnerable to capital flight. Opportunities for place-marketing/place making around food (e.g. through appellation contrôlée)
<i>Authenticity</i>	Global food is anonymous, inter-changeable and lacking a connection with a particular place/culture/ecology/season	Local food expresses the particular values and characteristics of place/ecology /culture/season
<i>Taste/Quality</i>	Quality sacrificed in favour of logistical values such as shelf-life, durability and standardised shape/colour	Greater local varieties of taste, colour and texture. Short distances emphasise taste over logistics Gourmet/artisan emphasis on quality
<i>Status/Prestige</i>	Where status used to accrue to the consumption of exotic items sourced from distant locations –	Gourmet localism as the new exotics. Local seasonal produce allows consumers to show

global agribusiness makes such commodities banal and universally available.

off cultural capital and pursue 'distinction strategies' (Bourdieu 1980)

In short, no one stands up and says allotments or farmers markets are anything other than a thoroughly good thing. Nobody even says that a DIY emphasis on food localism and self-sufficiency is parochial, eccentric and a legitimate object for jokes – because 'The Good Life' is no longer the dream of cranky eccentrics but the central aspiration of the middle classes, who desire to 'escape to the country.'

At the same time, there is a great deal of latent hostility towards the multiple retailers who are deemed at least partly culpable for a whole range of social problems including:

- Unhealthy eating habits
- Binge drinking (by selling under-priced booze)
- Undermining the integrity of local high streets, destroying small shops and engendering 'clone towns' (Simms et al 2004)

And with sustainability becoming a significant driver of policy with regard to food and agriculture (DEFRA 2006), the UK government has now, for the first time in fifty years, recognised food security as an emerging strategic imperative (Gregory 2005; DEFRA 2006; BBSRC 2009; SDC 2009).

6.2 'Local Food: How to Make it Happen in Your Community': Transition as Organised Social Entrepreneurship

"When food is once again central to our lives...[small scale commercial market gardens] will sit in a wider mosaic of productive back-gardens, vibrant farmers' markets, fruit- and nut-tree plantings on city streets, school grounds reconceived as small farms, Community Supported Agriculture farms on the green belt land around cities and any free land that can be brought into productivity used for allotments and food gardens....[all in all] a new food culture" (Hopkins and Pinkerton 2009: 19)

From a Transition perspective, a systemic shift away from the energy intensive, industrial, global food system is not a matter of choice, or even necessity. It is an inevitable consequence of the accelerating climate change and an imminent energy crunch consequent upon peak oil. The role of Transition is to accelerate the transformation of economic and social systems and soften the landing through a process of anticipatory relocalization.

For obvious reasons food production and processing provides a major focus for Transition activity. Rob Hopkins and Tamzin Pinkerton (2009) provide a compelling vision of what we should expect. "If we were to be able to taste, smell, hear and feel the UK in 2030 in relation to how it now feeds itself, what might it be like?" They then paint a predictable but enticing picture of a more diverse, productive, more hand-crafted landscape, worked by a great many more people and producing goods for local markets and contributing in a more balanced way to eco-system services, particularly carbon sequestration. Hopkins then goes on to describe in detail the movement which is, in his view, beginning to bring this vision of bioregional food localism into existence. *Local Food: How to Make it Happen in Your Community* is a handbook which provides a directory of food related social innovations and social entrepreneurs. Replete with case studies and tips for setting up different kinds of community project, the book is essentially a 'how to' book for would-be social entrepreneurs.

As Hopkins points out the revival of local food in the UK as well as other countries comes on the back of years of dedicated and overlapping activity by a wide range of organisations both commercial and 'third sector' (notably the Food Links network). From a Transition perspective community food projects are not only about feeding people. They aim to 'open up the community space between

individuals and the structures of government and business...[and] to enable, show and remind people that they can determine their own worlds, build their own power and confidence and significantly transform their food culture” (27). This emphasis on empowerment underpins the wider themes that, in the Transition strategy more generally, are implicit in the local food agenda. For Hopkins and Pinkerton food localism points the way to economic democracy and more creative forms of shared ownership and decision making. It nudges participants out of their fossil fuel comfort zones anticipating new roles, household activities and skill sets that will become unavoidable features of daily life as resource depletion sets in. Food projects provide compelling vehicles enhancing identifications with the ecology, landscape and people of particular places. Finally community food projects are seen to facilitate the unleashing of the creative and entrepreneurial potential of ordinary people whilst facilitating community integration and engagement and the accumulation of social capital.

So what are the experimental community enterprises, social innovations and skill sets that will take us ‘back to the future’? The directory gives a comprehensive overview, focusing on the following categories.

- The ‘great reskilling’: artisanal entrepreneurs and activists resurrecting traditional crafts and knowledge/skill sets. These include the seemingly mundane (bread making, preserving), the esoteric (‘the art of fermentation’) and the exotic (at least in Britain – wild food). The chapter ends with advice on holding ‘Great Reskilling’ events.
- Domestic (garden) food production: Projects included Lewes Open Kitchen Gardens Project, an organised garden tour and network to share skills and knowledge.
- Allotments and gardening for community groups: The 300,000 allotments in the UK cover 12150 hectares, produce 250000 tonnes of fresh food per annum and are sited on private or council land. In the latter case they are likely to have statutory protection (p 56).
- Garden/Land Share Schemes: Tens of millions of private gardens in the UK cover up to 400,000 acres, suggesting a capacity to feed up to 1.5 million people (71). Landshare schemes match up people with under-used land with would-be gardeners and facilitate partnership agreements with minimal legal protection.
- Community Gardens: In the UK up to 1000 Community Gardens use a variety of sites (including private, council and squatted land and community owned land trusts). ‘Guerrilla gardening’ involves illicit planting of food plants, trees and crops on spare land. Participation is rewarded with a proportional share of the produce.
- Community orchards: In the UK there is now a vigorous movement to halt and reverse the loss of orchards and fruit varieties. In addition to food production, such orchards typically become the focus for local festivals (e.g. ‘wassailing’ ceremonies) and play a role in community integration and cohesion.
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): Organic farms working in the commercial market but using labour from participating members of the community who are paid in kind. In the USA there are now 1500 CSA projects.
- Farmers markets: Allowing them to sell direct to the public, such markets allow small farmers to bypass the supermarkets and wholesale markets and pocket a much higher proportion of the consumer spend.
- Food cooperatives
- School projects
- Local food events

A recent *Which?* survey revealed that nearly a quarter of UK adults were growing some of their own food, most for the purpose of saving money.⁸ With over 150,000 allotments and with nearly 90,000 people on waiting lists, the National Trust recently pledged to provide a further 1000 plots on its land. And according to the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG), there are now over 1000 Community Gardens providing opportunities for thousands of growers. Finally, the Landshare scheme has resulted in 55,000 growing partnerships.

Summary:

Clearly there is evidence of some considerable success in developing local food cultures. However despite all of this activity, the global food system, along with the transnational supermarkets, logistical and agribusiness companies which run it, continues to become more entrenched. Steady growth in the organic sector, the proliferation of farmers markets, long waiting lists for urban allotments, the school kitchen gardens, the 'landshare' schemes, the innovations in 'community supported agriculture' – although real achievements, these developments have had no impact on the global food system and account for only a minute fraction of food production and consumption. If the kind of food localism sponsored by the Transition Network has been successful it has not been in challenging the structure of the food system but rather in expanding the numbers, knowledge base and the skill sets of people involved in local, low input food production. Depending on the nature of any systemic crunch this may certainly prove to be a source of considerable resilience, particularly in more isolated rural communities. On the other hand it would be hard to argue that it has made or indeed could make any impact on the resilience of the major urban centres.

7. Why are people getting involved?

Very little of what goes under the banner of Transition skills is new. There has been a resurgence of interest across the whole range of artisanal activities and crafts. The question then arises as to why people are getting involved. With regard to food growing there is certainly evidence that the rising cost of food is a significant driver – as was always the case with the culture of working class allotments. The notion of Transition Skills intimates a similar instrumental 'left-brain' response to a perceived risk i.e.) recognizing the dangers of systemic collapse consequent upon climate change and rising energy costs, people are weighing up the odds and preparing themselves and their children for a radically different kind of world. The strategic objective of the Transition Handbook and all Transition-related activities is after all to raise awareness of such risks and engender exactly this kind of response.

But that kind of rational cost/benefit analysis doesn't really explain why patent lawyers, policemen, school teachers, firemen, call-centre attendants and university lecturers are queuing up to learn the difference between the hedge laying styles in Devon and Dorset.

Alongside a rising undercurrent of anxiety about the viability of our integrated global system, we also seem to be experiencing a renewed counter-cultural movement against industrial society per se, and specifically the global consumer society. This kind of right-brain response to the rationalization of modern life is not new. It has been a persistent feature of Romantic and left critiques of capitalism for over two hundred years – from the utopian socialist experiments of Fourier and Owen, through the back to the land movement of the 1880s, the arts and crafts movement and the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s.

⁸ <http://www.which.co.uk/news/2011/07/which-survey-reveals-grow-your-own-trend-is-still-on-the-up-259281/> - accessed 25th July 2011.

In one form or another all of these movements railed against what Marx described as ‘alienation (Ollman 1976).’ Under capitalism, the wage relation and the factory system separated people from each other, workers from the things that they produced and human beings from what Marx called their ‘species being’ i.e.) their capacity for conscious, collaborative creative activity.

In modern industrial society we work but don’t produce any of the things that we need. Everything is produced for us – literally handed to us on a plate by complex systems of which we understand very little. And as a result, although most of us work very hard, we don’t get to express our deep-seated human capacity for conscious, collaborative creative activity. This is another way of saying that we don’t get to express our human nature.

In modern zoos there is now a much greater attention to the links between psychological and somatic health of animals in captivity. Management regimes are structured so that the animals get to express the fullest range of their natural behaviours. This clearly has limits. It is natural in some circumstances for chimpanzees to conduct brutal wars between rival groups including opportunist assassinations – a pattern of behaviour that no zoo would allow. Lions are not permitted to hunt live gazelles. Never the less, zoos are now very aware that in the wild animals have to work for their living. Foraging and hunting involve the deployment of the fullest range of senses and mental capacities. Keepers will now often hide food so that clever animals like monkeys and parrots have to work hard to track down each morsel, keeping mentally and physically fit in the process.

But in modern Western type societies, we ignore the same lessons for people. In the Pleistocene environments in which our bodies and minds evolved, refined animal fat and sugar were rare hard fought for luxuries. In modern societies, millions of fast food vendors compete to cut costs. Calories cost virtually nothing. But not only are calories over-abundant, their consumption is stripped of social significance. With the disappearance of domestic production or procurement, domestic processing and cooking and in many cases even regular meal-times and the social act of eating together, modern individuals are increasingly cut off from the rituals of breaking bread. Eating together was always been the central drama of daily life through which children were socialized, groups bonded and we identities re-affirmed. A trip to McDonalds is not only an exercise in thermodynamic hubris. It also denies the our social and creative human nature. And the same denial operates in all the other domains of consumer society. Where our Pleistocene ancestors spent hours crafting tools and other material artifacts of everyday life, in artistic endeavours (Dutton 2009) and inventing and telling stories (Dutton 2009; Boyer 2001) – our capacities for collaborative creativity are consistently blocked or blunted. Goods are piled high in the stores. We create, repair and produce nothing (or at least our production is directed at servicing abstract and impersonal systems rather than creating objects and processes which bear our personal imprint).

Lewis Mumford (1934) argued that technology is part of what we are as human beings. But whereas in traditional societies technology was integrated into our social institutions and our creative lives as individuals, modern society turns technology into a black box which delivers services or functionalities but strips us of any active involvement in the process. We have created a gilded cage for ourselves in which all the elements of material culture are delivered pre-digested, pre-packed, ready to use, ready to eat, ready to throwaway – by a very old fashion zoo-keeper called Amazon or Walmart.

Human nature is fundamentally creative in a way which links intellectual imagination and conception, social collaboration with others and working with hands and senses. Bearing this in mind, what the set of Transition Skills listed above all share is:

- **Tradition** – sense of continuity with generations of craftsmen
- **Kinesthesia** – bodily engagement linking hand and brain
- **Intellectual cognition** – imagination and conception

- **Materials** – a deep understanding of the qualities and attributes of materials (e.g. the grain and moisture content of a particular piece of wood etc.)
- **Ecology** – the relationship between materials, the people who work them and a particular place and ecological system
- **Aesthetic** – They involve an appreciation of beauty and form.

Summary: The Transition project of relocalisation taps into a deep-seated desire for existential meaning which is strongly connected to this dimension of human nature and is manifested in the desire to resist the fragmented experience of learning and creativity that has come to define modern occupations and the experience most people have of education.

8. Transition Histories and Transformation

8.1 Transition histories

Transition makes a great deal of local history and the significance of the knowledge of community elders. Petro-fuelled modernisation has transformed communities and local economies, in many cases within the life-times of older citizens. Recovering older patterns of economic activity and community life is the first step towards de-naturalising the assumptions about energy usage and material throughput, and the urban-planning and regulatory regimes which underpin our economy. In short remembering that ‘it has not always been so’ opens up the possibility that things might change radically in the near future. Thus an important part of the Totnes and District Energy Descent Plan was based on oral history interviews with local elders, focused on the period 1930 and 1960 – “the last period in the history of the town when energy was in short supply, and a more localised food system was still functioning, albeit declining over the period in question.”⁹ The picture which emerged from these interviews was of a more coherent and self-organised market-town, playing a more significant role in the surrounding agricultural economy. Covering the period of enforced self-sufficiency during the war, interviewees had fond memories of growing food at home, in allotments and in the grounds of schools.

This recovery of local memory has greater salience in smaller European market towns where the older medieval relationship between city and countryside is still evident in the architecture and urban form. The growth of the supermarkets and the internationalised food system has been so rapid over the last two decades that small, over-grown market gardens on the urban periphery, disused cattle and wholesale markets often bear witness to a more localised economy in the recent past..

A little further back, the ‘dig for victory’ experience during the war provides a permanent touchstone for community-level resilience. Certainly the war-time experience was an example of a massive shock to a British economy, almost completely severed from a global network of Commonwealth and Imperial trading routes upon which we had become dependent over a period of almost two centuries. And this shock had enormous implications for towns and cities all over the country – not least because for the first time in a century, British farmers were expected to feed the entire population.

However, this limited experience of sufficiency and relocalization (or at least renationalization) of the economy, though inspiring, doesn’t necessarily provide a convincing model of a relocalized future. Population growth, further integration into a global economy, dependence on increasingly sophisticated technological systems and a massive increase in per capita energy consumption, together create an almost unbridgeable distance between would-be ecological down-

⁹ <http://totnesedap.org.uk/book/part2/stories/>

shifters in the present and the vignette of self-reliance that is forever retreating in the rear-view mirror. One can get a sense of this from those aspects of technological modernity that those Totnes elders thought should be retained into a lower-energy future, if at all possible. The list included computers, the internet and solar panels – technologies which are conceivable only with a global division of labour and a consumer market including hundreds of millions of people. Others such as the National Health System and ‘jobs for life’ were in their origins and remain umbilically tied to a high energy, national economy oriented towards permanent growth and expansion.

What this illustrates very well is that although Transition communities evoke a spatial and intergenerational continuity with more local, bounded and even bioregional communities of the past, the reality is that, with few exceptions, the ‘survival unit’ of most modern, urban people is a global, connected and interdependent population numbering in hundreds and thousands of millions. Modernity is a historical first. Global industrial civilisation is a novel and untried system. It involves an unprecedented level of complexity and interdependence, and the first instance of ecological overshoot at the level of the biosphere. There have been many instances of a civilizational collapse as a result of the unintended environmental consequences of economic and demographic growth (Tainter 1988; Diamond 2006) – but nothing on this scale. In short there are no examples to draw upon.

8.2 Cross-scale dynamics

This problem of open, connected, *gesellschaftlich* communities attempting to parachute into a more relocalized, communitarian, *gemeinschaftlich* future engenders a difficult ‘double bind’ which becomes very evident when one considers cross-scale dynamics and instances of ‘perverse resilience.’ Because of the deep-seated dependence on complex, industrial systems, the resilience of individuals and communities to an enormous range of environmental and economic shocks is unfortunately tied to growth and the continuing viability of these systems. For instance, failures in relation to capital accumulation would very quickly undermine and even destroy capital intensive national health systems, dependent as they are on such an array of full time professional workers and industrial and pharmaceutical products. More generally it is very difficult for all but a minority of people to develop sustainable livelihoods which are not intimately locked into the mainstream economy. The capacity of families and communities to recover from earthquakes, episodes of flooding, fire or even communal violence and rioting is equally tied up with the fortunes of the mainstream economy and corporations.

Thus in a very obvious way -- for individuals, families and communities – the adaptive trajectory for long term resilience and sustainability is more often than not in tension with the ‘perverse resilience’ of and reliance on the connected systems of industrial society.

Transition to an extent acknowledges these problems but is premised on the notion that imminent energy shocks will prove fatal to those systems, removing the obstacles whilst at the same time forcing communities down the path of relocalization. Prefigurative strategies centring on ‘community energy descent plans’ might be able to ease the birth-pangs of the newly local world order – but probably only at the margins.

9. Conclusion

It seems incontrovertible that there is a fundamental tension between the biosphere and the expanding trajectory of the human economy. A diagnosis which centres on the unsustainable hubris of permanent growth and draws attention to the thermodynamic and ecological context of human culture, lends itself to a critique of modernity and modernisation.

Given the premises of catastrophic climate change and an imminent energy shock, the prefigurative strategy of resilience through relocalization seems, at first sight, to make a great deal of sense. As well as being the historic opportunity intimated by the discourse of Transition, relocalization may well turn out to be an unavoidable imperative and predicament. And on this basis the strategy of pre-emptive preparation seems both rational and credible. Even if the worst fears of climate change scientists and peak oil analysts are not born out, the strategy of relocalization could improve the health, community cohesion, resilience, economic vibrancy and happiness of places and communities hollowed out by the ephemeral logic of disembedded market forces. Certainly Transition taps into long-running currents of alienation with consumer society and a more recent cultural backlash against the destructive fungibility of place associated with 'big-box' retailing and global fast-food franchises. Transition very effectively makes the argument for the synergy between cultural authenticity and ecological integrity.

Nevertheless, there are tensions in this strategy which are in part deliberately ignored or downplayed by proponents of Transition. The unit of analysis for people living in modern societies is the complex, interconnected world system – with all that implies in terms of growth and material/energy throughput. We may live in places which look like coherent communities. The architecture and landscapes may bear the imprint of ancestral communities which occupied these same sites. But the endless circulation of goods, people and information which accompanies modernisation has shattered beyond resurrection these integral conjunctions of place, ecology and economic activity. The 'taskscape' of global economy have little to do with the bioregional logic of landscape, watershed and market town. But it is these taskscape which structure our patterns of consumption, production, friendship, culture, education and family life.

It is not hard for environmentalists to identify the ecological catastrophe unfolding in the tramlines of these global taskscape. It is equally easy for peak oil pundits to identify the vulnerabilities associated with this brittle, complex and over-connected global economy. But unfortunately many of the things that we most value – the cosmopolitan approbation of cultural difference, democracy, social liberalism, meritocratic egalitarianism, equality of opportunity – also emerged in the wake of this same progressive integration of economic activity across space. Most difficult is the historical sociological truth that psychological individuation is also substantially a legacy of unfolding modernity.

Transition is very much informed by resilience theory and the heuristic of the 'adaptive cycle'. In this framework, 'panarchy' refers to the interweaving and cross-scale interactions of higher and lower level systems. Gunderson and Holling use the term 'remembrance' to refer to the way higher level dynamics may impede innovations and transformations at lower levels and 'revolt' for the countervailing tendency whereby lower level dynamics cascade up and disturb or destabilise higher level cycles (2002). Building on the insights of complexity theory, resilience theorists suggest that interventions may be most effective during the 'release phase'. An important insight here is that small-scale 'back-loop' interventions may be effective in preventing or ameliorating the breakdown of systems at higher scales.

From this perspective the Transition strategy of developing 'energy descent' plans – i.e. pre-emptive reorganisation of the societal energy regime in anticipation of chronic energy shortages – involves a kind of deliberate and channelled 'creative destruction', and the attempt to trigger a process of 'revolt' i.e. a prefigurative back-loop intervention which reduces the chances of a catastrophic process of systemic disintegration. Where Schumpeter saw creative destruction as a necessary dimension of the business cycle, opening the way for technological innovation and a new regime of accumulation, the political economy of peak oil suggests a more fundamental readjustment whereby the energy throughput of the human economy comes back into line with the parameters of solar productivity of the biosphere as a whole i.e. signalling a permanent end to fossil fuel driven growth economics.

The aim of Transition as a particular back loop intervention is effectively to engender a particular cross-scale interaction i.e. a 'revolt' whereby the discourse, practice and a range of economic and institutional innovations associated with localization in the energy and food systems start to cascade up, undermining the stability and appearance of unassailable permanence of the globalised food and energy systems.

In the UK and increasingly in other parts of the world the Network has proved remarkably successful in spawning groups of local citizens intent on enrolling support from across the community and developing energy descent plans. With regard to food systems, the movement has generated a wave of interest in permaculture and rides on the back of a more general cultural dynamic that has seen a resurgence of interest in allotments, farmers markets and farm shops, organic box schemes and in some areas schemes for shareholding and co-ownership schemes in relation to community farms. It is certainly true that the Transition/relocalization movement is generating both a powerful discourse and a range of innovative practices in relation to localism.

According to the RA Practitioners Workbook: "Innovation and change may require loosening the connections between the focal scale and the larger scale and cultivating tolerance for new and alternative ideas, resources and other sources of novelty" (RA 2007: 59). This also provides an almost complete statement of what the Transition movement is trying to achieve in practice. 'Energy descent' and local reskilling initiatives are precisely aimed at weakening the monopolies that have been established by large, impersonal external systems. At the same time the Network is very much geared to establishing a discursive space for ideas such as permaculture.

As a process of social innovation, Transition is creating an institutional fabric for the coalescence of a discourse of localism and sufficiency in the food system. As well as increasing citizen awareness of ecological impacts, the movement is also beginning to create market demand for new local products. By eschewing political confrontation and emphasising instead familial and community empowerment and resilience, the Network is also engendering an atmosphere of greater political receptivity for higher level regulatory innovations and even regime change (for instance in the UK Somerset County Council briefly became the first Transition Council publicly committing itself to preparing the county for resilience in the face of peak oil and severe climate change).

A key strength of the Transition Network is the commitment to a horizontal structure. Certainly the movement's success so far has been largely driven by the efforts of charismatic social entrepreneurs such as Rob Hopkins, and more lately in the United States, Richard Heinberg. But although these people have put together a convincing package and written persuasive books, the movement still relies on the autonomous efforts of groups of individuals working in their own communities. The bar for becoming an 'official' Transition Initiative is set deliberately high, mainly with a view to ensuring that there is sufficient local momentum to carry the group forward. If social innovation is about generating the requisite social and cultural capital to drive change, then the Transition movement is succeeding in a big way.

However all of these apparent successes are at the level of discourse and ideas. They have made almost no impact on the structures or material flows of the global economy and food provisioning systems. Whilst relocalization is undoubtedly becoming a significant form of counter-culture, the global food system is deeply entrenched and presents enormous obstacles to any kind of systemic restructuring. As the RA manual points out "if the focal system is in the late-conservation phase there may be strong resistance to change"(2007: 71). In effect the pattern of 'remembrance' associated with global food and energy systems is pervasive, structuring all kinds of common sense and legal assumptions about the way food is produced, processed, distributed and consumed. It is very difficult for visions of possible alternative regimes to achieve any kind of purchase in popular consciousness, let alone the object of large scale experimentation.

Transition can re-invent place-bound ecocultures at the margins, but it is unlikely to succeed in orchestrating any process of ‘revolt’ and systemic re-organisation, in advance of any wider collapse. This suggests that the Transition model may quickly reach limits, and need modification for the strategy of resilience through localization to begin structuring political-regulatory agendas and corporate business models. In short, those in the Transition/relocalization movement probably need to consider the issues of *thresholds* and *scale* i.e. how extensive does the embryonic experiment in food and energy localism need to be to initiate an effective process of ‘revolt’, and at what are the priority interventions and institutional scales for this to take place?

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