

Extinction Rebellion

The dynamics of contemporary radical British environmental activism



The boat Berta Cáceres blocking Oxford Circus London 18 April 2019
(Source author)

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Abstract

Environmental problems are current and pressing with actions and resolutions required now. Reducing the impact that humans have on the environment poses some of the biggest and most significant challenges facing the world today. Activism has an important role in shaping where the environmental debate is focused and is central to a vibrant democracy. This research examines the contemporary radical environmental activism of Extinction Rebellion (XR) in London undertaking activist participatory research as a member in 2019 and 2020. It critically examines how this radical contemporary British environmental activism is made and sustained, highlighting alliances across difference and examining those spatial dimensions of this activism that shape and make it impactful.

It contextualises this local XR contemporary environmental activism within a history of radical British environmental activism to identify what is a continuity and what may be novel. It then examines the entanglement of place and activism establishing how place shapes the activism and has framed, shifted and developed the discourse.

It explores how the concept of generations can be differently understood and how an understanding and the appreciation of the generations, particularly the old and the young, explains and informs what activities and actions activists are prepared to undertake. It also identifies a significance concept of *eldership* in activism.

The research explores emotions, feelings and affect in activism that appeal to grief, hope, love, pride and vulnerability. It examines how these are generated and what they do. It reviews how these activism have sought to use framing in language and discourse and concludes that this is important to understanding these activism and the impact they have had.

The thesis introduces the concept of *Patterns of Serendipity* which identifies the significance of the interweaving of multiple lucky accidents that make activism impactful in a particular place at a particular time. The research uses *Activist Smartphone doings* as a methodology to overcome and make sense of the messiness of activism which produces unique understandings in different places and temporalities.

It concludes that these XR activism are a dynamic, reflexive, purposeful and intensive, form of contemporary radical environmentalism.

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Love and Rage...in the spirit of hopefulness!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I'm tired. It's day 11 of the Extinction Rebellion's London actions and I went to the farewell gathering at Marble Arch. An artwork by Banksy appeared on a low wall just to the right of the arch. Another rebel told me that Banksy was like a ghost...just an ordinary looking bloke with a cap and the paint was still wet. I took a photo. It's of a young girl planting an XR flag and hoping it will grow. I felt quite overcome and had to sit down for a while. I feel sad and hopeful at the same time. This time and place is important. I hope that this really is the moment (Field Diary 25.04.2019)¹.



Figure 1: Artwork at Marble Arch London (Source author)².

Environmental problems are current and pressing with actions and resolutions required now. Reducing the impact that humans have on the environment poses some of the biggest and most significant challenges facing the world today. Activism has an important role in shaping where the environmental debate is focused and is central to a vibrant democracy. More broadly contemporary environmental activism can make a significant contribution to providing focus on important environmental problems, raising collective consciousness and signposting solutions³ (Langford, 2018):

Protest has certainly been a consistent feature of the development of British democracy since the early nineteenth century, and it continues to influence

¹ The spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitalisation in field diary extracts in this thesis reflect the actual entries and have not been subsequently revised.

² All of the photographs and video clips used or referenced in this thesis were taken by the author during actions.

³ This PhD has been developed from the Research Project by Proposal which was submitted in partial fulfilment of the Degree of MA in Social Research at The University of Sheffield.

political culture and to shape public spheres of debate (Doherty, 2009, p. 730).

This research examines contemporary radical⁴ environmental activism⁵, using material collected during activist participatory research as a member of Extinction Rebellion (XR) in 2019 and 2020, viewed through the lens of geography and spatiality. The research is from a local and everyday⁶ perspective as a member of an XR affinity group, which was linked to an XR London borough-based group which undertook actions in London. Although individual activists are given *permission* by XR to undertake any action on its behalf that is consistent with the movement's principles and values (Extinction Rebellion, 2019), during the first year on the streets of London XR organised seven foci for action from October 2018 to October 2019. These actions are set out in a timeline (Figure 2) and my participation in them in London produced a large source of data used in this research.

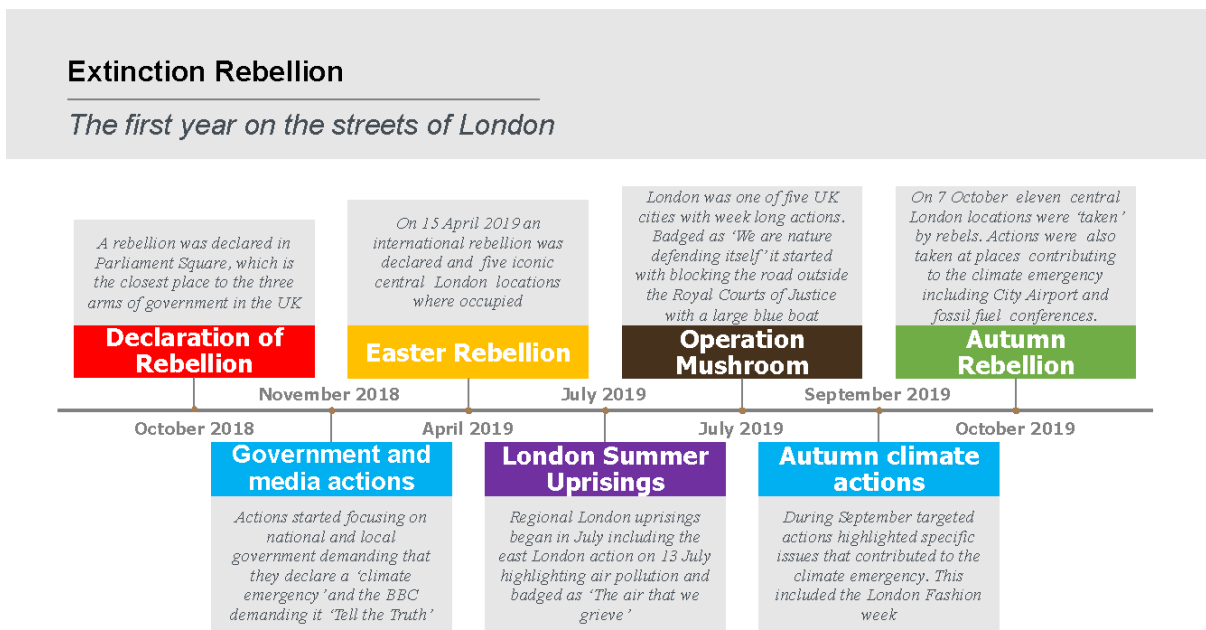


Figure 2: Timeline of major XR London actions October 2018-October 2019 (Source author).

⁴ There is no commonly accepted definition of the components of radical activism with ongoing debate about direct action tactics and eco-sabotage (see Kindig, 2022). Reference in this thesis to radical activism is to those activists that use direct action as a core strategy and tactic in their protest.

⁵ I prefer the term activism because there are many forms of activism and they are differently understood.

⁶ The everyday is a contested term which I use broadly recognising that 'what scholars do agree on is that there is no one everyday - that everyday lives are multiple, messy and full of methodological possibilities' (Hall & Holmes, 2020).

This thesis argues for the continued exploration and development of the geographies of social change in everyday activism which helps develop an understanding of why and how change happens and offers insights into how activism, that benefits the human and more-than-human, can be nurtured and promoted. The purpose of this thesis is to critically examine how this radical contemporary British environmental activism is made and sustained, highlighting alliances across difference and examining those spatial dimensions of activism that shape and make it impactful⁷. As Manski identifies, activists are interested in impact and being effective.

In the course of struggle, activists teach themselves and others lessons about how to build lasting, effective, well-resourced movements for the road ahead, and it matters to activists whether those lessons proved correct. If they are correct, activist efforts escalate overtime from particularised local conflicts to generalised campaigns to large scale and potentially revolutionary social movement projects (Manski, 2019, p. 45).

It examines this local contemporary British environmental activism in the context of XR's emergence since 2018 in the light of new social movement theory⁸ and through a geographies of social change perspective. This chapter contains a literature overview which describes the main literature relevant to this thesis. It then identifies those current environmental debates and perspectives that are important to give context. The next section sets out the main aims and objectives of this research and the final section outlines the structure of this thesis and explains and contextualises the importance and relevance of this structure to researching the empirical phenomenon of XR as it is encountered by an activist at a local level. There is then a brief synopsis of what is contained in each chapter.

Understanding environmental activism

Activism, including environmental activism, is researched and reviewed across the different disciplines in the Social Sciences. Most of the literature uses concepts and theory from the disciplines of sociology (Yearly, 2005; Saunders, 2013; Jasper,

⁷ Impact is a contested term in social research. In this research it is used broadly to assess and understand those actions and activities that activists believe are worth doing or have results that they notice and value.

⁸ More detailed analysis that contextualises XR in the light of social movement theory is in chapter 3.

2018; Berglund and Schmidt, 2020), politics (Doherty, 2002; Doyle, et al., 2016) and geography (Routledge, 1996; Anderson, 2010; Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012) but there is also important literature from those scholars researching from social psychology (Droogendyk and Wright, 2017) and historical (Downs and Manion, 2004) perspectives. Although scholars may refer to concepts and theory from other disciplines, they tend to privilege their own discipline in research and analysis. Most of the research on activism is within disciplines with some interesting interdisciplinary exceptions (Gillan et al., 2008). This thesis draws upon all of these disciplines' literature on environmental activism but focuses on the contribution that geography and spatiality can make to the understanding of these contemporary environmental activism.

Activism, including environmental activism, is often researched and understood through the lens of new social movements theory and there has been debate about whether XR may be best understood as part of a wider environmental social movement or as a new social movement in its own right. This is not a debate that is pursued in this thesis which although it gains insights from social movement theory does not seek to position XR precisely within it, being more interested in what XR actually does. The new social movement theory that has developed since the 1960's remains a concept that is highly contested. Social movement studies analyse how people come together, mobilise, become political and challenge the dominant and powerful. The trade union and labour movements that emerged in the nineteenth century are the oft cited examples.

New social movements developed in the early 1960's to challenge 'new' dominant ideas and address new issues and concerns (Melucci, 1994). Scholars have sought to explain this 'newness' by the emergence of a new scholarly lens, by their distinction from old movements or by their emergence in a new post war society (Saunders, 2013). The characteristics of the 'old' and 'new' movements are compared in Table 1.

| Type of . . . | OLD MOVEMENTS | NEW MOVEMENTS |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Rationality | Formal | Substantive |
| Reason | Instrumental | Value fundamentalism |
| Interest | Self-interest | Collective interests |
| Scope | Universalism | Particularism |
| Ethic | . . . of responsibility | . . . of ultimate needs |
| Action | Strategic | Exemplary |
| Organizational form | Hierarchical | Fluid |
| Democracy | Formal | Participatory |
| Milieu | Closed, class based | Open and supported by counter-cultural networks |

Table1: A comparison of the characteristics of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ movements (Saunders, 2013, p. 127).

There are two distinct approaches to explaining the development of social movements. The first, which predominates in the American literature, is person/actor/ action centred and developed theory about resource mobilisation and political opportunity. Resource mobilisation theory identifies the emergence of social movements at moments when activists share the same goal and have the resources to build a movement. Political opportunity theory proposes that movements emerge when ‘new allies become available and opponents seem vulnerable’ (Doherty et al., 2007, p. 822). Both stress the rationality of activists in responding either to some sort of deprivation or developing opportunity. This tradition focuses on understanding how activists mobilise and on explaining the patterns of that protest. The second, which developed mainly from European scholars, argues for the importance of networks and the development of a *symbolic*, or collective identity which then has expression in solidarity. Williams describes collective identity as ‘the norms, beliefs, symbols, identities, stories and the like that produce solidarity, motivate participants

and maintain collective action' (2004, p. 94). This approach describes collective identity as a *process* that may lead to the *outcome* of solidarity. The European tradition seeks to understand ideology and why new social movements emerged in the post war period as the *New Left* developed. In this tradition, social movements are not fixed entities with fixed memberships or ideologies and can sustain a considerable level of diversity.

Doherty has identified four characteristics of new social movements. Firstly, those involved develop a 'common identity' which is not simply based on a common ideology. Secondly participants use 'network ties' in which they take common action or exchange ideas. Thirdly they take part in 'public protest' and fourthly they seek to 'challenge some feature of a dominant paradigm' (2006, p. 702). Many scholars, who research and write about social movements, argue that most new and transformative political and social ideas are spawned in non-institutional settings. Doyle et al. refer to them as 'the form in which new combinations of people inject themselves into politics and challenge dominant ideas and a given constellation of power' (2016, p. 81). Many of the theories and concepts now debated in 'academia owe their origins to grassroots community activists' (Routledge, 2017, p. 9). Some manifestations of activism gather momentum, mobilise and gain visibility, but within a few years the focus of activism shifts. So environmental activism has a history of change and development but also of building on and reusing strategy and tactics whilst developing *nuevo-activisms*. There is limited literature that places contemporary activism, such as the various manifestations of XR, in its historical context and examines what aspects are a development from activist traditions and what is unusual or novel, particularly in radical activism.

Environmental issues are increasingly global, from climate change to waste plastic packaging in the marine environment, despite becoming manifest, and articulated as problems, in specific places (Rootes, 2005). Place is important because it is often not until people come together in one place and discover new possibilities that change happens. 'The identification with particular places can be of strategic importance for the mobilisation strategies of movements' (Routledge, 2017, p. 7). In addition, when many important environmental concerns are global, activism about these problems coalesces to make a difference in a specific place. However, the

literature largely prioritises the examination of the place/activism entanglement either with narrow aspects of the concept of place or does not differentiate adequately between place and space (Routledge, 2017), or engages multiple specialties (Leitner et al., 2008) rather than focusing on and examining the complexity of the gathering, weaving or assemblages of meanings, materialities, and practises in a place (Cresswell, 2014). The literature often examines why movements emerge where they do, rather than how place shapes the impact that environmental movements have in achieving change (Routledge, 1992).

Some literature notices the age and generation of activists. Many of the eco-activists of the 1990's were noted to be in their twenties (Wall, 1999). There is emerging evidence that different cohorts of the population are now involved in radical eco-activism (Saunders, et al., 2020) with the national media reporting the involvement of 60, 70 and even 80-year-olds:

Four others were arrested during the weekend, including a 72-year-old man and a 65-year-old woman after being cut out of devices outside the fracking site, taking the total number of protesters arrested in September and October to 48 (The Guardian, 2017).

A disabled 85-year-old woman was left bruised after being dragged across a busy road by three police officers during an anti-fracking protest (The Independent, 2017).

Are these the grown-up activists of the 1960's or have contemporary environmental problems inspired a new cohort of *silver activists*? In addition, different generations are taking action together, but the importance of this has not been researched, nor understood. How alliances between different population cohorts, particularly across generations, are made and sustained in British contemporary environmental activism is not adequately described, explained or understood by the current literature.

Equally, there is a wide range of literature on the importance of emotion in driving people to take action (Brown and Pickerill, 2009; Routledge, 2017; Jasper, 2018), however little of this examines specific emotions, feelings and affect and what they do in different activist strategies, tactics, actions and practices. Most of the literature is not empirically based nor focused to examine and understand the importance of context. Many social movements attempt to change the framing and language used

to describe and understand their activism, using emotional, rational, and ideological processes (Adams, 2002) and seeking to change how individuals, organisations and groups, identify and interpret activists' concerns (Taylor, 2000). XR has since its launch purposefully adopted strategies, tactics and language to reframe the understanding of, and debate about, the climate emergency to inspire urgent action. The impact of XR activists on this framing has not been researched nor evaluated systematically elsewhere. In addition, this research aims to build on the radical environmental activist literatures that explore how activists use novelty, innovation and tradition; the importance of generations life-course and transitions; how place can shape activism and vice versa; the use by activists of emotions, feelings and affect; the role of language and framing and how environmental histories have shaped local manifestations of XR in London. These are summarised in figure 3 below.

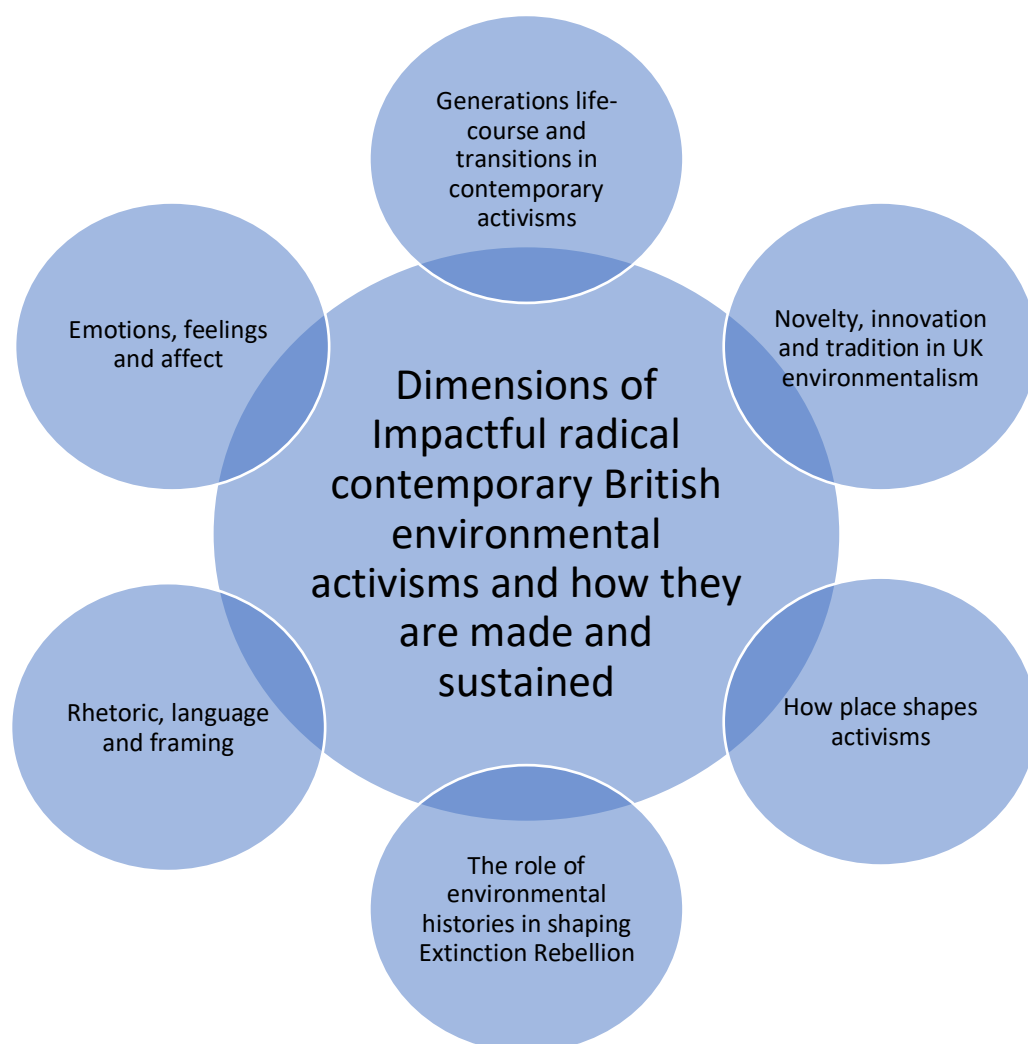


Figure 3: Dimensions of impactful radical contemporary British environmental activism and how they are made and sustained from an everyday activist perspective. (Source author).

These are significant features of this radical environmental activism and important to an understanding of its messiness, of its spatial dimensions, its ideas and practices and what it feels like and what it does. These under researched dimensions of radical environmentalisms appear important, entangled and impactful to XR activists in the everyday practice of XR activism in London. As Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) identify 'what is still missing are detailed empirical accounts of the messy, gritty and real everyday rhythms as activists envision, negotiate, build and enact life beyond the capitalist status quo in the everyday' (2010 p.481).

Extinction Rebellion: Aims, theory of change, values and organisational structure

On 31 October 2018 XR declared a rebellion as a result of a climate emergency. XR had begun to emerge into public space in May 2018, initially formed by activists who were part of Rising Up!, who have close links to Occupy, Earth First! and other environmental social movements. XR was initially a campaign under the umbrella of Rising up! rather than an organisation in its own right and had three aims which were expressed as demands (Melia, 2021).

XR would have three demands, mainly for governments but also for other organisations such as the media: *tell the truth*, by declaring a climate emergency, *act now* to halt biodiversity loss and reduce emissions to net zero by 2025, and move *beyond politics* by convening a citizens' assembly, representative of the UK population, to decide how all this was to be done (Melia, 2021, p. 169)

XR began to lay down a challenge to the state. It also laid down a challenge to other environmental activists, movements and organisations to become more radical and urgent in their demands and tactics which was symbolised in mid-October 2018 by its occupation of the UK headquarters of Greenpeace. Many environmentalisms emerge and develop organically, often around a small group of early leaders. As they grow, they develop organisationally, or as a network, and begin to express their purpose, values and objectives. Unusually the strategy and tactics of XR were purposely developed around a very specific theory of how change happens that was promoted by one of XR's founder members Roger Hallam. This theory of change or

the civil resistance model was overt and published from the outset and has six elements. Firstly, a need for significant numbers of activists to act and get involved; perhaps fifty thousand people or 3.5% of the population. This 3.5% rule was adopted as a result of reading the research of Erica Chenoweth (2017). Secondly, the focus of action needs to be on the government and elites in the capital city; Thirdly, you need to take Direct Action, break the law and get noticed; Fourthly, the activists need to be non-violent. Fifthly, organised actions need to be sustained day after day and lastly these actions need to be fun and uplifting (Hallam, 2019). The importance of this theory of change and a critique is examined in detail in chapter 3.

This is given expression in the internal structure and organisation of XR. It was characterised by two features. Separation into local groups and national teams and operating as a self-organising system (SOS) which is an adaptation of the holocracy⁹ way of working. XR is separated into local groups and national teams. Local XR groups are active at both a local and/or regional scale and organise into working groups and affinity groups. Working groups focus on particular projects, plan mass actions and support members. The local XR working groups may include:

...group support, arrestee support, arts, books, coordination, finance, food, messaging, newsletter, office, outreach, political, regenerative culture, self organising systems, social media, spokespeople, talks and training, and welcoming at meetings (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020, p.43)

Affinity groups, often made-up of between eight and twelve people come together to prepare for and take action. They seek to develop a shared vision of what they want to achieve and look after each other before, during and after actions. 'Affinity groups can autonomously decide what actions they want to take part in, either participating in one of XR's mass actions, joining with other local affinity groups to do an action or undertaking actions on their own' (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020, p. 44). XR nationally does not directly engage in actions but organises in UK wide working groups and supports rebels with common interests to come together into themed groups such as XR Faith, XR Scientists, XR Farmers or XR Youth. It has a representative and

⁹ Holacracy is a method of organisational governance which is used by both businesses and non-profit organisations and it is a type of self-management that is intended to enhance an organisations ability to adapt and change quickly without hierarchical accountabilities (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020).

outward facing function seeking to represent XR as a coherent movement to government, the wider public and other organisations. In addition it acts as a treasury, gives guidance to local groups about how they might coordinate themselves and seeks to pull together strands to develop a unified national strategy.

SOS was created using many of the principles of Holacracy and was formally adopted by XR UK's Anchor Circle in March 2019. There have been a number of developments and refinements of this method of organising with the most recent iteration set out in the XR UK's Constitution: The Self-Organising System: Guiding & Empowering The Rebellion (Extinction Rebellion, 2021). The key features of SOS¹⁰ are a distributed authority, self-organising circles, linking structure, decentralised power, and transparency. Distributed authority gives people with defined mandates, specific roles and the ability to take action within that mandate with responsibility for seeking input from others with an ability to contribute. Self-organising circles are teams operating and organising within their mandates and roles to deliver that mandate. Each circle is responsible for ensuring coordinators attend wider circle meetings to ensure coordination. Power is decentralised and distributed into roles and circles using collective decision-making with a responsibility for transparency by keeping decisions visible, recorded and accessible (Extinction Rebellion, 2021).

Current environmental debates and perspectives

XR, like Fridays for Future (FFF), has demanded that the government *tell the truth* about the climate emergency by acknowledging that *the science* is clear about anthropomorphic climate change and the consequences for populations and biodiversity. However, there are different perspectives on the current environmental problems and these lead to substantially different understandings of the nature and causes of those problems, the range of potential solutions and what actions individuals or groups might become engaged in as a response. Below I identify three current environmental areas of debate and perspectives to contextualise subsequent analysis in the following chapters which position XR and its engagement in relation to them and how this increases our understanding of this activism.

¹⁰ An interactive diagram which sets out all of the circles in the SOS and their functions is online at <https://organism.extinctionrebellion.uk/?id=0>

Anthropocene and planetary boundaries

There are two related ideas that attempt to capture the profound and complex impacts of humans on the environment. The first is that the Holocene has ended and that a new epoch, dubbed the Anthropocene, has emerged since humans began to substantially impact the world's environment. The second is that there are a set of nine planetary boundaries¹¹ within which humanity can continue to develop and thrive whilst crossing these boundaries increases the risk of generating large-scale abrupt or irreversible environmental changes (Castree, 2014). XR accepts that it is human's impact on the world that has caused the *climate emergency* and that there are likely to be *tipping points* or *multiple collapses* (Extinction Rebellion, 2021) unless action is taken immediately to stop further greenhouse gas emissions. This framing and narrative of human impacts is examined in chapter seven.

Nature, Socio-Nature, Ecocentrism and Wildlife

Nature is a contested concept but all of the major environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) define themselves in regards to human's relationship with nature. Analysing how activists understand the environment, nature and its relationship to societies' human endeavours is a key element of their activism. Meanings of nature include 'the non-human world', the 'essence of something' and an 'inherent force' (Castree, 2005, p. 8). However, 'an immediate problem with the word nature is that it has multiple overlapping meanings' (Habgood, 2002, p. 1). Some scholars argue that 'any framework that seeks to separate nature and society into discrete realms is utterly disabling' (Loftus, 2012, 1). Bakker (2010), using the concept of *Socio-Nature*, developed a descriptive typology to identify and analyse many of the ways in which natures are neoliberalised.

Other scholars reject the anthropocentrism that this society-nature dualism presumes. Deep Ecology¹² or Ecocentrism considers that all beings are of equal value and 'the world is an intrinsically dynamic, interconnected web of relations'

¹¹ The nine planetary boundaries are nine key processes, influenced by humanity, that threaten the stability of the entire Earth System. These are: climate change, biodiversity integrity (functional and genetic), ocean acidification, depletion of the ozone layer, atmospheric aerosol pollution, biogeochemical flows of nitrogen and phosphorus, freshwater use, land-system change, and release of novel chemicals (including heavy metals, radioactive materials, plastics).

¹² Deep Ecology was a concept first used by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (Naess and Rothenberg, 1989)

(Eckersley, 1992, p. 49). Lorimer suggests we need a new word and ontology and puts forward *Wildlife*; 'In wildlife I find an alternative ontology to Nature to inform future environmentalism' (2015, p. 7). He suggests that wildlife 'lives among us' and is 'risky, endearing, charismatic and unknown in our post-Natural world' whilst being 'discordant with multiple stable states' (Lorimer, 2015, p. 7). Although XR values are rooted in respect for nature and the natural world, its vision is sufficiently broad to allow a variety of views and opinions about activists' and societies' relationship with nature and it has chosen to engage with and respect nature through a specific concern about biodiversity loss. Anderson (2009) draws our attention to a relational sensibility of emotion registered within a human being that is produced through the co-constitution of that human within a transient convergence of nature. This entanglement of activism, nature and generations is explored in more detail in chapter five.

Environmental Justice and Citizenship

Environmental justice is an idea that everybody has a right to a fair share of the world's resources and a decent environment to live in and as such is founded on a 'rather anthropocentric worldview' (Doyle et al., 2016, p. 97). Rootes has identified that both the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Friends of the Earth (FoE) have come 'to the conclusion that the equitable distribution of the Earth's resources is essential if the environment is to be protected, and sustainable development is to be achieved' (2005, p. 693). The linked, and also anthropocentric, idea of *Just Sustainabilities* developed by Agyeman integrates the concepts of social justice and sustainability. Agyeman (2013) argues for the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems. One of the early criticisms of XR by other radical groups was around not embedding issues related to environmental justice squarely into its principles and values or demands. My research has identified that this challenge has led to a response by many XR groups giving expression to this in developing a fourth demand. For example, XR Hackney's fourth demand is for a *Just Transition* which is examined in more detail in chapter 3. The concept of climate and environmental justice and how it has shaped the development of XR is examined in subsequent chapters, particularly in chapter seven where how XR frames these concepts is reviewed. Environmental citizenship has become prominent because

many scholars and activists are sceptical that governments, either individually or collectively, are able to bring about the long term and fundamental social change required.

Environmental citizens do not simply hold green values and take action to demand policy change, perhaps more importantly they also 'do their bit' for the environment in their everyday lives (Doyle et al., 2016, p. 250).

XR resists an approach in which individuals are judged by how good environmental citizens they are and in preference challenges the system that makes taking positive environmental decisions difficult. This contesting of the individualisation of environmental problems and solutions by XR, whilst not negating the importance of living the life you believe in, continues the tradition of radical environmentalisms:

They would see that their individual consumption choices are environmentally important, but that their control over these choices is constrained, shaped, and framed by institutions and political forces that can be remade only through collective citizen action, as opposed to individual consumer behavior (Maniates, 2002, p. 50).

This theme is developed in chapter three when considering the long-standing tensions between radical and reformist environmentalisms in the UK and in chapter seven on language and framing.

Main aims and objectives of this research

In the context of the literature identified above this thesis has the following aims and objectives. The aim of this research is to examine how Extinction Rebellion activists in London become mobilised about environmental issues at multiple scales and in multiple ways. How they build alliances and how they choose to manifest and express that concern effectively. This is approached by examining the key dimensions of this radical contemporary British environmental activism, and how these dimensions are made and sustained. It uses the theoretical concepts of social movements, place, generations and life-course, emotion, feeling and affect, language and framing through the lens of specific contemporary environmental concerns.

In order to achieve this the study had four objectives:

- **RO1** *To document, explore and understand the radical environmentalisms of Extinction Rebellion from the perspective of a borough-based group and an affinity group in London, contextualised within the UK's history of environmentalisms, highlighting its spatial practices.*
- **RO2** *To consider what impact these activist practices have at multiple scales and in multiple ways.*
- **RO3** *To identify examine and understand how people of different generations are involved in and use these activist practices and how this helped them to cohere and create solidarity.*
- **RO4** *To explore how emotions, feelings and affect are generated and entangled with activist practices at different spatialities and establish what they do.*

In the context of the evolution of environmentalism¹³ in the UK this research seeks to explore and understand how this activism emerged and was sustained in environmental action and activism at different scales. It examines the role and importance of place, different population cohorts (particularly generational cohorts) in the context of a cycle of environmental activism between different environmental issues or topics.

Structure of this thesis

There is a broad body of research, particularly activist research, that uses the power of stories and narrative as a prominent mode of knowing and presenting experiences (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010) (Flick, 2014). Storytelling is central to how both activism is understood and shared but also to how it is understood academically. Therefore, retelling these stories in a way that mirrors the way that activists themselves understand their activism, allows insights into activist real-life

¹³ Environmentalism is a highly contested term. Which is explored in more detail in chapter 3. Some scholars question its usefulness as a concept or the possibility of defining it. 'There is no such thing as environmentalism. Any attempt to define the term in a succinct manner necessarily excludes any array of other valid definitions. 'Environmentalism' is simply a convenience – a vague label for an amazingly diverse array of ideas that have grown up around the contemplation of the relationship between human beings and their surroundings' (Schlosberg, 2003, p. 3).

experience, is richer and more nuanced with a better understanding of context that is more situated. So, this research is inspired by adapting narrative analysis to focus more on moments of activism than themes, recognising that 'concepts such as episodic knowledge and memory are based on stories as a format for knowing about issues and remembering events' (Flick, 2014, p. 264)

In addition, the approach to this research and its structure is informed by a political ontology that considers knowledge that is not just what or how, but where (Mol, 1999) recognising that 'it is through the everyday rhythms that meaning is given' (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010, p. 475) or as Buchanan asserts 'the everyday evidences a discernible form and conceals a knowable logic' (2001, p. 90).

Therefore, the structure of this thesis that researches the empirical phenomenon of XR at an everyday local level has been chosen to mimic and reflect the loose coalitions of ideas and practices of activism on the ground. Seeking to understand this phenomenon requires that the messiness is exposed and examined with the relations and connections explored. These fluid, messy and overlapping boundaries of environmentalisms are examined in more detail in chapter 3.

Because the majority of XR's organisation is local with devolved decision making it is difficult to have a sense of what XR's activism is unless you research it from the locale. I use the term *activism from below* to describe this everyday activism at a local level, by which I mean understanding by doing the activism, by being on *the streets* and in the *organising spaces*, where the activism is situated and not primarily from above or from the side. This gives insights into *moments of action* and *intensity* that may not be apparent externally, by which I mean observing but not part of the action, or above, by which I mean researching from a distance or from a position in a hierarchy. Research is always partial and positioned in nature and never only from above or below, from inside or outside. There is always an inside and an outside and it is not a binary as we are always in multiple places with multiple connections. However, because XR has a sense of being an organisation and does have a hierarchy, *activism from below* in the locale captures where this research primarily takes place. In conclusion the structure of this thesis responds to the methodology used, the positionality of the researcher, the nature of the activism that is being

examined and those elements of activism identified by the activists themselves as important and impactful.

This thesis has seven remaining chapters. Chapter two examines and explains the methodology used in the research. It identifies the methods used and has a justification of methodological decisions. It examines the researcher's use and choice of activist participant observation, field notes, sound diaries, photographs, video clips, website and document analysis, moment analysis and the use of smartphones in this contemporary activism and activist research. It describes the aims, practicalities, limitations, and skills involved in using *activist smartphone doings* as a method, identifying the importance of rigour, reflection and triangulation. The chapter also discusses the resolved, unresolved and emerging ethical issues in this activist participatory research especially when generating and managing new media data in the context of non-violent direct action with the possibility of arrest and prosecution. There is a section on reflexivity, positionality, and knowledge production. It identifies and discusses the implications of being an activist and academic, the situatedness of the research, in and from a specific locale and affinity group. It identifies the affinities and disaffinities of the researcher with other activists which shapes the research as well as how this has influenced the choice of research focus on place, generations, emotions and language. This section also gives a context for my *personal stories* at the beginning of each of the remaining substantive chapters. Each story identifies and frames my positionality before a description of the data and a subsequent analysis and discussion. The final section examines the implications of disruption in social research generally, and this project in particular, due to the COVID19 pandemic concluding that there have been some significant challenges as well as unexpected opportunities.

Chapter three contextualises this contemporary UK environmental activism within a brief history of British environmental activism, particularly because the history of more radical activism is not well represented in the literature. These XR activisms are contextualised in relation to eight key features of British environmentalism since the 1970's. These characteristics are: The long-standing tension between reformist and radical environmentalisms. That radical activists are often perceived via the lens of stereotypes, lifestyles and subcultures. That there is a significant focus in British

environmentalism on scales and an evolution and overlapping of the topics of environmental concern. That British environmentalisms have often been perplexed by their lack of diversity and difference. British environmentalisms have never been easy to define with fluid and overlapping boundaries. Seventh, that most radical environmental movements emerge, develop, have differential impact and then either become reformist, marginal or disappear completely. Lastly, historical activists have developed a repertoire of tactics which are drawn upon and developed by new manifestations but sometimes in different and unusual ways. This contextualisation allows examination of the position of contemporary activists and the extent to which it builds upon that history and what is novel. It identifies and examines XR's similarity to, and more importantly differences from, other environmental activists, that allowed these XR activists immediate impact. It also introduces the concept of *patterns of serendipity* and argues for understanding the significance of *lucky accidents* in the analysis of successful environmental movements. It identifies this manifestation of XR's novelty and innovation and how it has built upon the tradition of UK environmentalisms.

Chapter four examines the entanglement of place and this activism and how place shapes the activism and framed and shifted/developed the discourse. How place contributes to activists that are both exclusionary and inclusive. This chapter differentiates between place and space, examining the complexity of place. The chapter also examines the development of the concept of place and argues that by engaging this slippery concept and its entanglement with environmental activism, and its complexity, a fuller and deeper understanding of this activism including what actions are impactful is obtained. It identifies eight aspects of place that are intertwined with activism which include: Creating collective meaning from a place of protest; places as territory including the role of police and their tactics; The place of performance art and music, place as a spatial strategy and as a space of contestation, protest camps in a place, places as memories, creating feelings of in and out of place and how social media is now a place of and for activism. It concludes that activism is never only local, regional, national or global. It is completely interconnected, and these scales are interdependent. It concludes that protest created meaning from a place and creating this meaning sustained activists

during long periods. Understanding how and why these activists use place is significant and important.

Chapter five examines how generations and lifecourse are important in the analysis and deeper understanding of this contemporary UK environmental activism. It explores how the concept of generations can be differently understood and how an understanding and the appreciation of the generations, particularly the old and the young, helps explain and inform what activities and actions these activists are prepared to undertake. It also identifies generations as a key dimension of activist solidarity and examines how it shapes activist identity in environmental activism. This collective intergenerational identity is ongoing, built-in stages and it evolves and is powerful in these activisms. The young and the old, taking action together, actively promote XR's messages and concepts of urgency, temporality and extinction. This proximate discourse between older activists talking about the past, and younger activists about the future, strengthens their collective claims about knowledge, experience and responsibility. It identifies the significance of eldership in understanding some activists' contribution to movement building and impactful activism.

Chapter six examines how these XR activists have consciously and unconsciously generated affect, feelings and emotion and the impact that this has had on individual activists, the wider social movement, and the public. It examines how emotions, feelings and affect are generated and what they do. This is explored through activisms that appeal to grief, hope, love, pride and vulnerability. These appeals, which are used and promoted by XR, are identified as overlapping and connected. It examines how they are generated and what they do in performance and art, use of and appeals to faith and in actions that are inconveniencing or disruptive. For example, death marches that can invoke grief and fear, humour as a mobilising force, and the importance of the moment of arrest of activists by the police in building alliances and giving insights into difference.

Chapter seven explores how XR has sought to use language and framing to achieve change. Activists often strive to frame their concerns in ways that seek to change how individuals and groups identify, interpret and express social and political

grievances. For example, privileging *emergency*, over *crisis* or *change*, as language for mobilisation about climate. It seeks to assess what has been effective and impactful and what less so and why. Some of this language and framing has led to criticisms and tensions both from within and without of XR and the establishment of internal organisation and mechanisms to ensure involvement and manage conflict. The language and framing have developed in the light of effectiveness reviews with development of language thought to be more impactful at different scales and in different places. It concludes that framing theory is still remarkably informative in understanding this contemporary environmental activism. It identifies and examines the tension between framing that seeks simplicity and clear messaging and that framing which seeks to promote and explain complexity.

The final chapter reviews four research aims and objectives and the extent to which they have been answered in the thesis. It summarises the main research findings. The main findings of the research which are empirical are described. I identify that XR is an unusual type of radical environmental activism in at least eight ways which include taking on characteristics more usually associated with reformist environmental movements. It also includes the purposeful entanglement of emotions, feelings and affect with its activism and intentionality and purposefulness in seeking to frame discourse. Methodological implications of using activist participatory research are examined as well as the importance of *patterns of serendipity* and the use of *activist smartphone doings*. Distinct conceptual contributions to place, generations, emotions and framing are identified and reviewed. It examines how activists use the concept of place and entangle it with their activism to move people to action across difference. It draws attention to how the concepts of space and place need to be carefully used and understood in their application in researching activism. It then argues that this contemporary environmental activism is a multi-generational and intergenerational endeavour in which understanding the concept of *eldership* gives new insights. It identifies three significant implications for the conceptual use of emotions, feelings and affect that flow from this research. Finally it draws our attention to the tension between framing that seeks simplicity and clear messaging and that which seeks to promote and explain complexity. Seven future opportunities and challenges for research on aspects of the geographies of social change are identified. It concludes by examining the implications of the findings of

the research for XR more generally as well as for other movements, government and academia. Concluding thoughts highlight the specific approach to examining radical environmental activism taken in this research which focuses on those aspects which appear to activists to be particularly important when undertaking their activism, what this activism does and summarises how this research has identified a sense of possibility and hope generated by this activism.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Bumped into Clare Saunders in Whitehall by Horseguards Avenue. I recognised her from the photograph on the back of her book 'Environmental networks and social movement theory'. She was with her research assistant. They were doing field work on youth protests using questionnaires. I wonder if she participates in any of the actions or is mainly interested to find out what's going on. She was in a hurry.....I walked further along Whitehall and spoke to two women holding placards outside Downing Street. They were part of the Rebellion and camping in Hyde Park. I told them that I was doing research on XR for a PhD at the University of Sheffield. I asked if I could take their picture and use it in my research. They both said 'please do'. There was a stream of young 'suited and booted' going to and from Downing Street getting their lunches, talking to the armed police (Field Diary 08.09.2019).



Figure 4: XR activists outside Downing Street London (Source author).

This chapter identifies, explains and examines the methodology and methods used in this research. The methodology provides an explanation and rationale for the methods employed in this study. It has an overall justification of methodological decisions as well as how methodological decisions were made and recorded in the field and why particular research methods and techniques were chosen. The chapter starts with a consideration of activist research and how knowledge about activism can be produced; not least as a tool to fight for a better world. It briefly examines why

and how I used activist participant observation, field notes, photographs, video clips, website and document analysis, moment analysis and smartphones in this contemporary activism and activist research. In choosing and understanding these methods of research I have followed Law's guidance that methods are not 'a more or less successful set of procedures for reporting on a given reality. Rather it is performative. It helps to produce realities' (2004, p. 143). I explore a new research method of *activist smartphone doings* whilst undertaking *activism from below* to make sense of the messiness of these activisms.

The chapter identifies the ethical policies and procedures within whose parameters this research was conducted. It then discusses the resolved, unresolved and emerging ethical issues in this activist participatory research especially when generating and managing new media data and in the context of non-violent direct action with its possibility of arrest and prosecution. There is a section on reflexivity and positionality, which gives a context and explanation for a *personal story* at the beginning of each of the remaining substantive chapters. Each personal story illuminates my positionality to situate the subsequent data exploration and analysis. There is also an explanation of how this positionality justifies and shapes the structure of this thesis. The next section describes and examines the impact, difficulties and opportunities of disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic on this project and points to the implications for social research generally. I conclude that the disruption led to significant research challenges but also unexpected opportunities for reflexivity. Finally, in the conclusion I draw together the main methodological learning and opportunities for further method development and research.

Activist research

This section examines how knowledge about activisms can be produced or discovered. It examines the nature of what makes productive research about activisms, where this should be undertaken, where the major constraints lie and which methodologies can most usefully be employed in this type of qualitative research. Gibbons et al. (1994) described an important trend that they observed in the way in which knowledge was produced, describing this as moving from Mode 1

to Mode 2. They argued that Mode 1 was the *traditional* way that research was undertaken and Mode 2 an emerging *new* method of knowledge production.

With Mode 1, the justification of knowledge production is weakly related to its application, with justification taking place within the bounded communities of individual disciplines and with the most important site of production being the University. Mode 2 production values relevance, impact and social accountability in research, with knowledge increasingly produced outside the University in the context of a particular application. This often draws the concepts and theories from different disciplines and may be undertaken on a multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary basis. The characteristics of these two modes are set out in the table below.

| Mode One | Mode Two |
|---|--|
| Usually generated within a single discipline and accountable to that discipline | Production aims to integrate different skills and disciplines. Accountabilities are diverse |
| Universal knowledge used to build and test theory | Knowledge is produced in the context of application |
| Data tends to be context free and validated by logic/measurement | Knowledge is recognised as particular and situational, contextual and embedded |
| Researcher is an observer, detached and neutral | Knowledge is co-produced, immersed and reflexive |
| Knowledge is produced by academics. Transferred to users in "traditional" passive ways. | Varied mechanisms for knowledge exchange, including social media, presentations and workshops. |

Table 2: Characteristics of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge production adapted from SAGE Encyclopaedia of Action Research (Coghlan, 2014).

One consistent conclusion is that Mode 2 production is becoming increasingly dominant and will eventually lead to the reshaping of Universities, Faculties and Disciplines (Nowotny, et al., 2001). Despite being aware of and noticing this trend from Mode 1 to Mode 2, some scholars assert that there is no ideal site for doing

research, including militant research¹⁴, arguing that each site has its own opportunities and limitations (Halvorsen, 2015).

Environment and ecology are often researched to understand the relationships within and between ecosystems and society, with the goals of social and environmental change. However just understanding the nature and significance of environmental problems is unlikely, of itself, to lead to anybody doing anything about them (Langford, 2018a). The belief systems that underpin much of the research about environmental problems often leads to the conclusion that change ‘could only emerge if traditional borders and boundaries of knowledge and power were bypassed, transgressed and where necessary challenged’ (Doyle et al., 2016: xvi). Research of this contemporary environmental activism explores the production of knowledge in the context of an application of local activism. The nature and objective of that application is to effectively challenge the orthodoxy and lead to urgent and radical actions to address the climate emergency. Using narrative as a method ‘foregrounds an interest in peoples lived experiences and an appreciation of the temporal nature of that experience’ (Elliott, 2005, p. 5). It also empowers research participants and allows them to contribute to determining what are the most salient and important aspects of the research (Elliott, 2005). This knowledge production is situated, by which I mean, in the spirit of Rose (1997), it is not universal or neutral. I consider the use of reflexivity as a strategy for situating this knowledge later in this chapter.

There is currently a tension in many disciplines in the social sciences between refining existing research methods and methodologies and developing new or refined techniques to gain deeper insights. Similar tensions exist between developing new theory or gathering better and richer data and having clear research plans and goals or frequently revising plans to let knowledge emerge during the research process. These issues are succinctly explored in Healy’s (2017) article *Fuck Nuance* and Besberis and Khan’s (2017) article *Less theory. More description*. New and old methods often overlap, feed off each other, and interact as a

¹⁴ Halvorsen understands ‘militant research as a committed and intense process of internal reflection from within particular struggle(s) that seeks to map out and discuss underlying antagonisms while pushing the movement forward’ (2015, p. 469).

continuous process of refinement, from trial and error and experimentation but from a base of existing understanding. I therefore commenced this research focusing on the empirical and being alert to the potential emergence of new methods that may reveal important insights about the research question which were not part of the original research project. As a result, during this research into XR's activism on the streets of London in 2019 and 2020, I discovered how a smartphone, with all its applications and features, helps to resolve and make sense of the innate messiness of activist participatory qualitative research in human geography.

Many scholars, including Anderson (2002), have highlighted the dangers and difficulties for researchers who have not made themselves intimately acquainted with the activism they are studying and the limitations of the research methods they use. He retells an incident where a student researcher of environmental direct action, who had not understood those that she was researching, did not identify those activists that were key to understanding that activism. She was not taken seriously by those that she did actually interview, who answered her questions as clear *mickey takes*. Once she had asked all her questions and they had been answered, she left with her *data*. However, because of her lack of understanding of the activism and poor research techniques she could not adequately assess or attribute what weight to give to this data that she had recorded; which was in fact none.

Researching as an activist immersed in the activism you are studying has the potential to allow fuller and deeper understandings and to better assess what weight and interpretation to give to different elements of the data that is collected.

In his discussions of practises and habitus, Bourdieu regularly suggested that scholars who observe activities without participating in them tend to draw logical models of them that miss much of their driving force (Jasper, 2007, p. 98).

Some researchers perceive themselves to have one foot in academia and the other in activism, researching as an activist, believing this presents them with both theoretical and practical difficulties. As Russell (2014) identifies, the problem of the activist/academic relationship has been a source of sustained concern for radical geographers. One approach that Pile (1994) proposes is finding space for research

between the dualism of *firstspace* and *secondspace*¹⁵ in *third spaces*. As Anderson (2002) explains, third space mobilises place, politics and hybrid identities to facilitate new combinations of once dualised elements that augment and supplement knowledge production. Adopting this third space approach proposed by Pile (1994), Routledge (1996) argued that in order to manage the *scholar activist* relationship a *thirdspace* needed to be created. This is a space where neither the scholar nor the activist, or either site, was dominant and therefore neither subverted the meaning of the other (Routledge, 1996). However, for Askins (2009) the academic and the activist cannot be separated. She explains that because of how she feels about the issues that she researches, learns and teaches about, that flow from a similar ideological commitment, they produce emotions across different spaces and places in her life, but they are integral and feed into each other (Askins, 2009); as the title of her article explains, *That's just what I do*. Routledge as an academic geographer spent time as an activist with Glasgow EarthFirst! over a ten-month period during which he conducted his research. Unlike Routledge, during my research I did not have 'a feeling of alienation from the everyday nuances, interrelationships and dynamics' (2017, p. 409) between being an activist and a researcher. Perhaps this was because I was an activist first who joined academia to research my activism rather than an academic, one of whose research interests is activism. My feeling during this research was that I had one foot in activism but only a toe in academia! Although this perception of feeling and place may well change and develop if my academic career progresses, what this difference makes clear is that the challenges facing each researcher and their positionality may be very different. My position is more aligned with Russell who argues that activist research, which he calls militant research, should 'become the art of producing tools you can fight with' (2014, p. 467) and therefore the concern to navigate between the fields of activism and academy can be surpassed as a problematic completely. Like Russell, there was no third space that I felt compelled to navigate between activism and academia, or indeed elsewhere, although recognising the value of embodied research methods in the field.

¹⁵ First space approaches are where the material world is empirically measured and mapped with second space approaches where this world is cognitively and conceptually written and thought about (Anderson, 2002)

My interest in research on activism is to understand what makes them impactful¹⁶ or as Halvorsen contends he is 'less interested in what activist research is and more focused on exploring what it can do' (2015, p. 467). So, in this research the boundary between academia and activism has been a challenge, but not in the sense that is often written about when examining the constraint of academia on activism nor concerns about being exploitative of the communities that you are researching. My boundary problems were bouts of impostor syndrome when in academia and or excessive energy and then exhaustion during activist research in the field. Often finding the field more immediately exciting and rewarding than the reflection and writing required in academia. When involved in actions, recording and reflecting on the data produced often did not feel as important as the moment. This was also why developing my own methodology, *activist smartphone doings*, to record *moments*, whilst still immersed in actions in the field, allowed subsequently a greater analysis, reflection, re-reflection and triangulation to assess the significance of those moments in the understanding of the activism. Using video methodologies with *moments* as the focus of research has proved revealing in other research of environmental activism (Waite et al., 2014). Using activist smartphone doings focused attention on *moments* in the activism, with the potential to both reveal greater or different understandings of what was happening that I had not realised at the time and a richer understanding of the significance of some related data. I explore and discuss activist smartphone doings in a section later in this chapter.

So, this research is more focused upon *activism from below* which gains insights from actually doing activism in its day today reality with all of the experience of emotion, tension, practical difficulties and conflict, rather than activism from *above* which plans, strategizes and analyses the overall impact of the activism. This approach seeks an understanding of the activism on the *streets* and the *organising spaces* from where the activism is situated and not from *above*, or from the *side*. It has similarities to a key method in Institutional Ethnography of *studying up*. Dorothy Smith describes and justifies the method of studying up as 'to begin to explore from where people were/are, to discover, the actual ways in which things are getting put together' (Keaney, et al., 2018, p. 295). This research was conducted beyond a

¹⁶ As noted earlier I use the concept of impact broadly to assess and understand those actions and activities that activists believe are worth doing or have results that they notice and value.

scholar/activism dualism and therefore in *researching this activism amongst* those aspects of the activism that seemed important from that perspective, such as place, generations, emotion and language were prioritised and this thesis is structured accordingly to document and analyse these aspects of the activism.

What research methods were used and why?

Even if there is disagreement about precisely what qualitative research and its methods are, they have become ‘the dominant way of doing human geographic research’ (Latham, 2020, p. 666) and participatory approaches are becoming increasingly more popular (Wynne-Jones et al., 2015). However, as discussed in the previous section, there are a range of traditional and established as well as emerging and new research methods. In deciding on the methodology and methods to use in this research I considered the risks of privileging new methods whilst being alive to the possibility of new methods emerging during the research. Hitchens and Latham identify the risks of over-emphasising the prevalence and potential of ‘methodological new-ness’ whilst overlooking those ‘geographers who are quietly getting on with the work of capitalising on the benefits of’ existing qualitative approaches’ (2020 p. 390). Others, such as the Aspect funded project *Methods for Change*, seek to make the case for methods that are creative, innovative and experimental. These new and innovative methods are:

Equally valid tools for understanding complex topics as more traditional methods, such as surveys or interviews, and in many cases will yield much richer data. However, because social science research deals with complexity, it can be messy! One of our challenges as researchers on this project is how we communicate research methods and approaches that are difficult to delineate neatly (Methods for Change, 2020).

The underpinning method of this project has been *activist participatory research* recorded in extensive field notes. I prefer the term activist participatory research rather than ethnography or participant observation, whilst recognising the central and important role that they play in qualitative research. This is because ethnography is also often used to describe the written product of research as well as the research itself and participant observation may imply to some primarily observation and a more passive research method than that which I employed.

As an activist and a member of XR, I undertook activist participatory research during 2019 and 2020 which included activism as a member of an affinity group, a borough-based group and undertaking actions in London. An affinity group which often consists of about ten activists is 'a group of people who share common ground and can provide supportive, sympathetic spaces for its members to articulate, listen to one another, share concerns, emotions, fears' (Routledge, 1996, p. 404) and perhaps more importantly take action together. I participated in a wide range of training and actions which included the Easter and Autumn rebellions, operation mushroom and the summer uprising in London during 2019. A detailed timeline and more information about these actions is set out at the beginning of chapter four. In April 2019 I was involved in the blockading of Oxford Street at Marble Arch and in October 2019 in the taking, holding and losing of Trafalgar Square, which became the rebellion's main focus for actions. Once the COVID-19 pandemic was declared at the beginning of 2020 some of the participation went online, but I also participated in actions during the September 2020 rebellion in London. Activist participatory research had the advantage of observing the impact of place and context, allowing the unexpected to emerge and gaining insight into how activists experience the world. As Garvey and Miller explain the methodology is:

'...living within our fieldsites, getting to know people and taking part in local activities and always intending not to adhere strictly to their original intentions with regard to methodology, nor to remain consistent. The point is rather to change and refine methods as the work proceeds and understanding of the local community grows (2021, p. 20).

This activist participatory research allowed multiple viewpoints to be heard, acknowledged, assessed and analysed (Winchester and Rofe, 2010). Understanding meaning and noticing and examining emotion, feeling and affect was important in this research. Participation offers the potential as a method which can attempt to transcend or ameliorate the epistemological and practical gulf between *insider* and *outsider* (Jackson, 1983) (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010) (Jordan & Moser, 2020). Jasper concludes that the best way to notice and understand emotions and meaning that flow from actions 'remained some form of involvement, through ethnographic

observation, direct participation' (2007, p. 97). This is not least because emotions, other than a handful of reflex emotions, are often difficult to discern from the outside.

Combinations and sequences of emotion are even harder for observer to interpret correctly, but cautious inspection of our feelings may allow us to tease them out with a fair degree of complexity (Jasper, 2007, p. 98)

Observations were recorded in a field diary which noted not only the visual but also sound and the visceral as well as personal reflections and methodological decisions made in the field. The notes were mostly contemporaneous but always recorded within twenty-four hours of the events or reflections. However, despite activist participatory methodology having the advantage of directly observing the impact of place in the context of activism, maintaining a contemporaneous field diary in a protest camp and as part of two weeks of ongoing actions presents some considerable practical challenges. I therefore included photographs and short video clips throughout the actions to capture *moments*, of up to a minute each. These were taken when there appeared at the time to be significant or important moments of action, emotion or changes in a place during the actions. These visual and aural methodologies were therefore used to complement and give context to participant observations.

There is growing acknowledgment of the potential of video methodologies in recording the qualitative unfolding of movements, flows, rhythms, and gestures as they happen' with its ability to identify and 'to trace subtle, ephemeral, non-verbal aspects of experience (Waitt et al., 2014, p. 290).

Pink (2021) however warns that simply using photographs or video clips as an observational tool, in isolation or as a standalone method, has the potential to objectify research participants and crystallise their lives into that moment in which they were photographed and images captured. As researchers, we should not expect to produce objective knowledge, recording it as detached observers. As Guba & Lincoln point out 'objectivity is a chimera: a mythological creature that never existed, save in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower' (2005, p. 208). Rather, it forms part of richer understanding and knowledge if used as part of wider observations and conversations (Pink, 2021). These images need to be understood and interpreted in

relation to the researcher and the researched. The images are essentially inseparable from the researcher and are both an intervention in the world and a situated statement on it. Issues such as; Why was this image taken? When was it taken? What were you feeling at the time? What was left in the image and what was taken out? What happened before and after the image was recorded? May all be important in understanding what the image may mean or represent. The act of producing these images has a social context and produces a very specific and orientated knowledge (Russell, 2014). Crang asserts that some qualitative methods in their application are 'often derided for being somehow soft and "touchy-feely" have in fact been rather limited in touching and feeling' (2003, p. 494). Bondi (2005) alerts us to the tendency of the discipline of geography to avoid, downplay or suppress spatialities entanglement with emotion. So, unlike some qualitative methodologies, activist participatory research allows the researcher to use their body as part of their research. This embodiment in the researcher and researched produces an understanding through and with all the bodily senses and their intimate connections to place, emotions, feelings and affect.

Bodies produce space and knowledge, and space and knowledge produce bodies. Being and knowing cannot be easily separated (Longhurst et al., 2008, p. 208).

Activist participatory research employs storytelling and narrative which have become more prominent and important methods in qualitative research generally and activist research in particular (Elliott, 2005) (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010) (Flick, 2014). This research *with* narratives offers insights into temporality and meaning in a social context for a specific audience. It also is used to understand and evaluate how activists perceive and understand impact¹⁷. How activists assess what tactics are working and who they believe their actions are having an impact upon.

XR's online presence is a significant part of its activism. XR's regularly curated website (<https://extinctionrebellion.uk>) has details of the organisation's aims, objectives and demands, its campaigns, events and actions, training and local XR groups. XR sends by email regular newsletters to subscribers, which are daily during

¹⁷ How the concept of impact is used in this research has been explained earlier, however I do not explore the debates about the meaning of causality within the social sciences which are examined in detail elsewhere. For example (Elliott, 2005) (Flick, 2014) (Bryman, 2016).

rebellions. It also has regular themed podcasts on subjects such as associated groups like Writers Rebel or Rebel Radio, the climate emergency, the involvement of faith groups or concepts such as climate justice. This research therefore undertook a document analysis of the website, newsletters and podcasts. The original project design included some face-to-face semi-structured interviews of activists in order to examine in more detail their life course. They were scheduled for April and May 2020 and therefore cancelled due to the Covid 19 national restrictions on meeting in person during this period. The interviews were subsequently not rearranged, either as in-person or online, mainly due to ethical considerations. These ethical issues and their consequences are examined later in this chapter. However, the research design always privileged participation and presence given this project's examination of spatiality, place and emotion in understanding these activisms.

Participation is privileged over interviews or surveys. It is easier to have an honest and relaxed conversation when on a five-hour hike as a fellow hiker... (Garvey and Miller, 2021, p. 20).

The project also undertook regular Twitter scraping to track during 2018 and 2019, at high level, any change in language used to describe the scale and impact of climate change and appropriate responses, as well as to identify where further, more detailed focus and data collection may be needed. This method is particularly good at identifying the actual nature and themes of discourse, as opposed to those aspects of a discourse that protagonists would wish to promote as important. These scrapings were captured using Capture for NVivo on Google Chrome, imported to, and analysed in NVivo. The word frequency data was visualised in NVivo using generated wordclouds. The visualisation made all hashtags stop words, used the most frequent words over four letters long and included stemmed words. Twitter scraping allowed me, when capturing frequent words and expressing them in wordclouds, to visualise data generated by people and institutions and how they were responding to and conceptualising XR's actions in real time.

Activist Smartphone Doings

Most research of *the digital* uses it as a data source rather than a method to reveal greater insights (Truong et al., 2020). Probably partly due to the rapid development of technology, there are no commonly accepted descriptors of this *digital*. *The digital*

in activism has descriptors including social media (Gerbaudo, 2012), cyberactivism (Sandoval-Almanzan and Ramon Gil-Garcia, 2014), cyberspace (Bryman, 2016), online (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015), new media (Winders, 2016), cellphone (Global Public Health, 2016) and more recently smartphone (Garvey and Miller, 2021) as well as others. Many studies of activism have researched the role of digital media in organising activists or have examined the data produced from a single platform or application, such as Twitter (Seegerberg and Bennett, 2011; Pearce et al., 2019), searching for connections or themes retrospectively. Most have researched limited uses of a smartphone's functionality, such as using smartphones to replace individual cameras. For example, 'Cellphilm' is proposed as a research methodology using a cellphone to record visual images as part of participatory research for social change (Global Public Health, 2016).

However, more recent research on smartphones is beginning to examine how the use of all smartphone functionality is entangled with peoples' identity. Researching how smartphones change people's interaction and presence in the social world, as well as how smartphones change proximity, presence and spatialities. For example, Millar et al (2021) researched smartphone entanglement with ageing and identified that there is not one smartphone. They concluded that in understanding how people use smartphones we need to recognise that smartphones are increasingly individualised by many users. They highlighted that smartphones are individually crafted by their users, developing overtime to suit individuals wishes, expectations, hopes and preferences allowing *perpetual opportunism* (Millar et al., 2021). Halliwell and Wilkinson (2021) explore how access to mobile phones and social media, through smartphone technologies, has revolutionised the ways individuals organise their social and cultural lives. They identify mobile phone methods as offering novel means of researching. Boase and Humphreys (2018) identify mobile methods as the means by which mobile communication technology is used to study the social world, that facilitates field-based research, the ability to control and gather complex data but that they also raise important and unique ethical considerations. Pink identifies the potential of the smartphone as a research method:

If the smartphone has the qualities and affordances that enables such forms of intimacy, sensoriality and affective experiences, this implies that it could

play further roles in the ways in which sensory ways of knowing are generated (2015, p. 136).

During my activism I had begun to observe how central smartphones, with all of their functionality had become to the organisation and repertoire of contemporary activism. Smartphones transformed the etiquette of protest as well as the temporality and emotion of protest responses. My response to Pink's encouragement to explore the qualities and affordances of smartphones was to seek to develop and explore a methodology which used this functionality and the consequential doings, which I conceived as *activist smartphone doings*. Using a smartphone as part of my activism made me feel more involved and immersed in its everyday practices and actions. However, the aims and objectives of this methodology of activist smartphone doings were: Firstly, as a research process for use on the move that assists in the understanding of place in activism. Secondly, to facilitate full and more complex engagement in planning, participating and committing to actions while generating and recording the data. Thirdly, to capture data that helps in a greater understanding of that unfolding complexity and messiness during actions including the role of emotion, how solidarity develops and how activists' everyday lives are entangled with their activism. Activist participatory research is messy. Understanding this messiness includes noticing a wide range of emotions and feelings invoked by being involved in action and feedback from others which may build solidarity. Lastly assess its potential to explore the tensions in activism focused on climate change as a single issue, the tactics used and the implications of difference. To assess if it could expose how activists balance a personal and work life with an activist life by juxtaposing them in the same space, thinking about the day to day and the present and what activists want their activism to be in the future.

The smartphone I used was an android Huawei P smart 2019 with 32 GB memory and 13 MP camera on the Vodafone network. The applications on the smartphone that were used as part of the doings were Basecamp which migrated to Mattermost, Facebook, Firefox, Google maps with the pin drop facility, Google Chrome, Instagram, The BBC weather app, Protonmail, Signal, Skype, Telegram, Twitter, WhatsApp and Zoom.

In constructing this methodology, it was important to consider what sort of data I hoped to collect to give insights to my research questions and use this to assess the functionality and robustness of the smartphone needed and the applications to install. The smartphone's camera needed to have sufficient resolution and sound quality capture to produce publishable photos and videos, be robust enough to survive activism practices and easy to use to be able to capture moments at short notice. The applications actually chosen balanced those applications that were being used by other activists with their security, functionality and ease of use. This needed to be reassessed during the progress of the activism. For example, XR activists migrated from Basecamp to Mattermost, mostly due to cost, and from WhatsApp to Signal, Telegram and Protonmail due to concerns about security of the data and communications. Each of the application's settings also needed to be considered and assessed as to which was most appropriate for this activism. For example, when application alerts were desirable and which broadcast and other groups and individuals to follow or subscribe too. Initially, I included too many groups with too many alerts which I subsequently needed to delete or fine tune. I also needed to add other groups as they emerged or had more relevance or prominence to the research and the activism.

An important element of the smartphone doings was smartphone hygiene. The objective of this hygiene was to only store on the phone only what was needed for current activism engagement and future actions. This hygiene included regularly deleting data not absolutely required on the smartphone for ongoing activisms, and downloading the photos, videos and applications data to an encrypted laptop. Initially I did this on a weekly basis. This reduced the likelihood of surveillance and data capture by others, ensured data security and promoted ethical practice.

An example of the data collected and analysed included WhatsApp chat for the researcher's affinity group, local group and Arrestee Support; Signal for the researcher's affinity group and other individual activists; Telegram for the local XR group, London Rebellion and XR Trafalgar SQ. Broadcast and XR Trafalgar Sq. Burning Earth. As suggested by Pink and Morgan (2013) the use of video clips of activity and WhatsApp chat created a richness, intensity, and depth of data which with intense observation and immersion was more closely examined at the analytical

stage of the research. Two examples from WhatsApp below show the range of data gathered. The first is from my affinity group (The Beekeepers) WhatsApp chat at the beginning of the Easter 2019 rebellion showing real time police activity in Parliament Square and planning for the location of future actions (Figure 5).

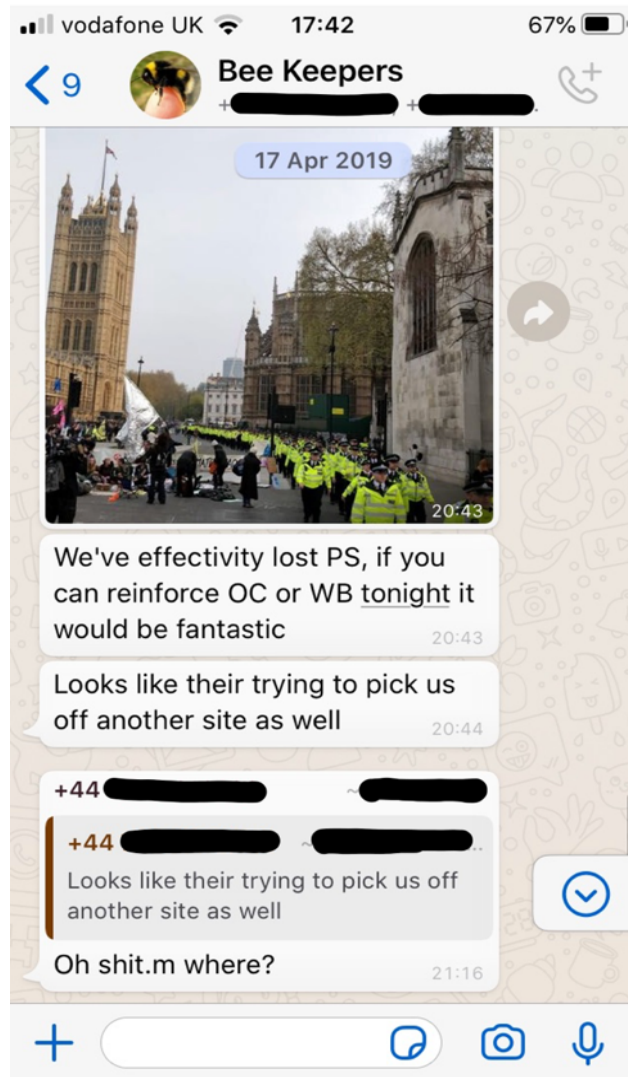


Figure 5: Affinity group WhatsApp messaging screenshot of chat between 20.43 and 21.16 on 17 April 2019 (Source author)¹⁸.

The second is a WhatsApp voice message from one of the Beekeeper affinity group members to the other ten group members updating them and providing encouragement and support. For example:

Okay guys I have to share this er.. via voice message because I'm a bit late for working today but I just had.. so I had a really nice encounter just people

¹⁸ PS = Parliament Square, OC = Oxford Circus and WB = Waterloo Bridge.

smiling at me because there were also from Extinction Rebellion and they saw that I am. So there were just so many friendly people on the Tube and umm.. then I got a lot of messages from friends who are in London who started to be like 'okay we also want to be part of it what can we do we don't have time now this is amazing' and now I just got er..erm.. I bought like, a like, a you know one of these bars that you can buy like they have it in chocolate with.. like a flapjack... at this organic store in Ealing Broadway and then they were like.. but they started talking to me and I were like you know what is the symbol so I told him about Extinction Rebellion and they gave me another one of these bars for free because they were like 'this is so amazing what you're doing' and it's just like these tiny little things happened this morning and erm ..keep it up guys. I'm so proud of us and I try to be there ..as soon as I can and hang in there don't forget to drink it's getting warmer. If you need anything let me know I'll try to get it to you later because now I'm off to work. So, keep it up. I love you guys. (Affinity group WhatsApp voice message 10.57 18 April 2019)

In order to seek rigour, reliability and validity in the application and interpretation of smartphone activist doings my approach was informed by the observations and proposals put forward by Guba and Lincoln (2005) to assess the quality of qualitative research. They propose two forms of rigour. The first in applying the method itself proposes 'prolonged engagement and persistent observation are attended to with some seriousness' (Guba and Lincoln, 2005, p. 205). The second form of rigour relates to the interpretation of the data generated by that method with a validity being assessed against the criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity.

The activism researched in this thesis was by its nature that which required a prolonged engagement, with a seriousness applied by the choice of smartphone applications their entwining with the activism and careful thought about what application settings were most efficacious in generating the appropriate data. The method itself allows for a form of internal triangulation, in that all of the functions and applications used in the *doings* are in essence stand alone, with the data they generate being able to be cross referenced with data generated from other applications or functions. In relation to trustworthiness my findings and insights were most importantly regularly discussed and checked with other XR activists at a local level, but also with other activist researchers and my supervisory team. The episodes in the main body of this thesis attempt to give rich accounts and a *thick*

*description*¹⁹ drawn from different applications in the smartphone and records kept at all phases of the research process. The interpretive enquiry of the smartphone data gave voice to the wide range of stakeholders' views and perspectives, claims and concerns and captured activists discourse, interactions and emotions allowing an interrogation of any solidarity that developed on these platforms.

Finally, there are three other substantive issues which need to be understood and reflected upon in the operationalisation of activist smartphone doings. The first is that in radical activism there is a significant risk of surveillance and arrest, in which data generated by the smartphone may make the researcher or other activists vulnerable. This is ameliorated, but not removed, by regularly downloading and encrypting of the data produced and then deleting it from the smartphone. This risk of surveillance is ever present and needs to be understood. However, for XR activism, which is always and exclusively non-violent, in which activists accept the consequences of their actions, the risks are often more about potential actions being discovered and disrupted by the authorities, making them less impactful, rather than any concurrent or post action surveillance. Secondly, there is a degree of technical skill required to configure the smartphone and to record the doings in a way that responds to the research aims and objectives. Lastly the researcher needs to recognise that the use of a smartphone interacts and shapes the practise of activism which needs to be understood in the interpretation of the data and how that is then represented.

In the following chapters I identify how data generated from these activist smartphone doings is utilised as evidence to support analysis and conclusions. In the conclusion of this thesis, I consider a fuller analysis and laying claim to the use of activist smartphone doings in participatory research as a multi centred/multi place methodology whose use allows greater understanding. It explains why this method is particularly suited to activist research and its contemporaneous understanding by demonstrating how the methodology helped answer the research question and its aims and objectives.

¹⁹ Geertz (1973) proposes thick description, by which he means a rich account of the details and data the research method produces, to provide others with a wide context for them to assess the transferability of the interpretation and enable them to make judgements about the findings.

Ethical issues in this research

This section examines the ethical issues in undertaking this research. The ethical framework for this project and its research methods included:

- The Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) six key principles for ethical research as set out in their Research Funding Guide October 2017. These include that the research should be conducted with integrity and transparency and aim to maximise benefits and minimise risk and harm.
- The University of Sheffield's research ethics general principles and statements.
- The University of Sheffield's specialist research guidance paper on *Ethical consideration in Participatory Research /Participatory Action research*.
- The University of Sheffield's research ethics policy notes; 3 Participant and researcher safety and well-being; 4 Principles of Anonymity, Confidentiality and Data protection; 12 Research involving illegal activities; 14 Research involving Social Media and 15 Demonstrating the impact of research.
- The ESRC's case study on surveying protestors.

This section particularly examines the implications of researching, of and with, activists involved in nonviolent direct action and breaking the law which can present major challenges to academics, particularly in relation to ethical considerations both for the individual researcher as well as the institution that hosts them.

...ethics has more to do with taking individual responsibility for learning what would cause harm to people. We assume that this will differ across different populations and demands a sensitivity to the specificity of each population (Garvey and Miller, 2021, p. 25).

Activist research is still possible, and of course important, but it places particular demands on researchers. This includes constant, often moment by moment, review of ethical considerations both for the researcher and those fellow activists who are not part of academia. So, navigating these complex ethical issues is important, time consuming, constant, emotionally challenging, difficult, and sometimes exhausting. Reflexivity, which is considered in more detail later in this chapter is important

because ethical issues are often not clear cut but need to be considered in the context of the researcher and their relationship with the researched (Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012). Particular focus before and during the project was given to the assessment and mitigation of harm, confidentiality and consent. To mitigate harm to the researcher a set of clear ethical standpoints, with examples of action to be taken in particular situations, were developed as guidance based upon the ESRC and University of Sheffield framework for research ethics. This included a statement on positionality, personal issues, values and beliefs. Harm to research participants can be subtle, complex and sometimes substantial.

The participants had all previously decided to become members of the XR and take part in its activities. However, the researcher only actively supported activists once he had investigated with them and confirmed that they had already decided to take part in an action and had considered the potential personal consequences of their actions. In most circumstances this included discussing with the participant whether the nonviolent direct action training they had undertaken had allowed them to reflect upon their motivations, risks and personal implications of taking action. In addition, I also supported activists who had taken part in actions previously and subsequently needed practical or *moral* support. However, Pink (2015) argues that conventional approaches to good and ethical research practices rightly take a pragmatic approach to setting out how we might best prevent our research causing any harm or disrespect to others.

The confidentiality issues in this research, given some activists may undertake illegal actions, were mainly about what data was collected, the way it was collected, how it was stored and what data is included in this thesis. The data was all stored securely and all digital data encrypted. I considered a range of approaches to confidentiality and anonymisation in order to mitigate risk to activists, while allowing the reader of this thesis to make sense of the involvement and actions of the participants (Bryman, 2016). This consideration included that the research used multi methods including social media research (Markham, 2012; Gerrard, 2021). As a result, I decided that all participants mentioned in this thesis would either be completely anonymised or identified by a randomly assigned alpha numeric code. For example, the eleven members of the Beekeepers affinity group were assigned randomly to B1-B11.

None of this research was undertaken covertly. However, participatory research poses particular problems with informed consent. Firstly, because the boundaries between research and everyday life can become blurred and secondly as the direction of the research unfolds, what participants are consenting to can be unclear and may change. Informed consent was given before data was collected which was appropriate to the situation. This ranged from written consent recorded on a consent form following discussion of information on a participant information form, to obtaining verbal consent from all present when photographing a group of activists. Some photographs or video clips were taken of people or groups in public places during the messiness of actions. Each one was subsequently reviewed to consider whether consent should have been obtained and if I was in doubt the data was destroyed. Examples of video clips retained, but taken without explicit consent, include the public performances of the Red Rebel Brigade as part of protest, The XR Drumming Band and the Police storming and clearing Trafalgar Square in October 2019. Every member of my affinity group knew and understood I was a researcher collecting data for a PhD, in addition to being an activist, as did anyone else that I met and spoke to during the research and data collection phase, even if I did not record any information as a result of the encounter. Pink (2013) suggests that one of the keys to ensuring that research practice is ethical is as far as possible to ensure that it is collaborative, by engaging the subjects of the research as participants rather than objects of an experiment. Taking actions with an affinity group is a collaborative exercise in which the research subjects have similar objectives and look for support from other affinity group members including the researcher. I therefore sought to be transparent and accountable whilst realising pragmatism was also important for ethical practice.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented particular and unique challenges. These were practical, legal and ethical. One of the research methods intended in this study was semi-structured interviews, particularly to examine and analyse activist lifecourses. This was to explore and understand how activists became active around climate change in general and XR in particular. Exploring lifecourse by semi-structured interviews or otherwise can produce unique and powerful insights about place, time

and emotion as well as helping to understand complexity not obvious by observation alone (Riley and Harvey, 2005; Jackson and Russell, 2010). I drew up key questions that were formulated to assist in analysis of the importance of the entanglements of generations and emotions with activism. However, national restrictions on meeting people outside of your household were introduced on 23 March 2020 and continued during April and May 2020. It was during this *lockdown* that the interviews had been scheduled, with a time and venue arranged with each one of the thirteen interviewees which were subsequently cancelled. I therefore had to consider whether the interviews should be rescheduled at a later date either face to face, remotely online, by phone, or not at all. The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns caused different challenges to different individuals that were unknown to the researcher. However, there was emerging evidence that not only did the pandemic present physical health problems but was also affecting some people's mental health. There was loss of support networks and separation from family and friends. For some people there was loss of income and or pressure at work, physical confinement and even food insecurity. Given this, I concluded that I should individually assess any harm that an interview, by whatever method, may cause to that individual participant. Within my competence, knowledge and the time scale of this project I did not feel confident that I would be able to assess any harm that may happen to those individuals whom I had originally planned to interview, some of which I knew were newly vulnerable. I therefore decided to cancel, rather than postpone, the semi-structured interviews and use other data from fieldnotes and video clips. In addition, I identified that examining generations and emotions entanglement with activism from a lifecourse perspective may benefit from further and more *in depth* research in the future.

Reflexivity and positionality

Reflexivity is a slippery but important concept in social science research. We need to be reflexive in our research practice because ways of imagining, seeing and knowing the world are fundamentally personal, whilst culturally and socially framed, linked to individual identities and circumstances (Pink, 2021). For many, reflexivity is a prerequisite for ethical practice (Rose, 2016). Lynch, in his wide-ranging article about reflexivity, *Against reflexivity as an academic virtue and source of privileged knowledge*, starts by asserting that 'reflexivity is a central and yet confusing topic'

(2000, p. 26). To highlight this confusion, he lists and describes an inventory, and sub inventories, of different reflexivities including mechanical, substantive, methodological, meta-theoretical, interpretive and ethnomethodological. In attempting to identify what reflexivity does, he identifies that:

reflexive analysis is often said to reveal forgotten choices, expose hidden alternatives, lay bare epistemological limits and empower voices which have been subjugated by objective discourse. Reflexive analysis is thus invested with critical potency and emancipatory potential (Lynch, 2000, p. 36).

Critically, reflexivity and how it develops the understandings, knowing and knowledge that is produced in research, depends critically about what reflexivity the researcher is trying to practise and how it is actually practised (Pink, 2015). Some scholars argue 'that reflexivity is not a method' (May and Perry, 2017, p. 150) but a critical ethos and dispositions that allow for reflections about how they produce knowledge in, and from, the social world. Others, such as Pink (2015), argue that it is a method and a collaborative process through which shared understandings are produced and in addition by reflexive and body conscious knowing and communication the texts produced from this knowledge can have powerful impacts. Pink (2015) also makes the point that different cultures, subcultures, people and places have different conceptions and notions of what ethical practice is. These different understandings problematise the idea that there is one set of rules that defines the ethical way to undertake research in the social sciences. Reflexive practice also needs to be able to respond to changing and unstable projects and recognise that researchers are unlikely to have one stable essential identity.

too often exhortations to reflexivity and disclosure tend to depend upon and reproduce problematic notions of a stable, tightly defined, unchanging research project conducted by a singular researcher, with one stable essential identity, both between locations and overtime, and suggest the latter is true of the researched (Crang, 2003, p. 497)

Research projects are often unstable not only over time but also to different audiences, with none of these presentations necessarily being the only true reflection of the project itself at any one time. Indeed, as researchers we are frequently unstable, refashioning ourselves not only between different places and

locations but also overtime. As Cook humorously confides 'I didn't set out to write an autobiographical PhD. It was supposed to be about fruit' (2001, p. 118).

Being reflexive recognises the subjectivity of the researcher in shaping what knowledge is produced and represented. However, reflexivity goes beyond concerns of bias and ameliorating that subjectivity. It needs to incorporate noticing how the researcher's presence may have affected their reality, the reality of those observed and the data collected. It is also wrong-headed to suppose that subjectivity could, or even should, be avoided or eradicated and that a reflexive approach will produce objective data. Subjectivity can be engaged with as a central aspect of data collection and its interpretation, representation and production of knowledge (Pink, 2021). Hitchings and Latham (2020) identify that human geographers have long engaged with, and debates about, embodiment and identity that foreground the manner in which relative power and personal characteristics play into the research process. This is what they call the big 'P' positionality issues.

In activist participatory research the positioning of the researcher in relation to the researched also raises some significant ethical issues, not least because in intense activism meaningful relationships develop with the research subjects. Although this facilitates a deep understanding, these relationships could also significantly impact those activists, potentially negatively (Winchester and Rofe, 2010). So, the reflexivity that I have sought to observe during this research, is a process of constant, self-conscious scrutiny, of the self as a researcher, of the researched and of the research process, being aware of what is happening, the social relations and how they interact with the data being collected (Dowling, 2016). It involved a commitment to self-reflection, thinking carefully, being self-aware, considerate and self-critical before, during and after the research process (Horton, 2021). However, as Rose identifies 'I found this an extraordinarily difficult thing to do' (1997, p. 305).

My reflexive approach is not as a researcher extracting and transmitting knowledge from research but a reflexivity that searches to understand and acknowledge the messiness of activist research and the significance of my positionality as well as the situatedness of the research. A reflexivity that acknowledges the complexity and difficulty of practising reflexivity.

Doing research.... is a messy business. Researchers are entangled in the research process in all sorts of ways, and the demand to situate knowledge is a demand to recognise that messiness (Rose, p. 314)

A positionality that recognises the importance of careful consideration of life experiences, personal identities, values, beliefs, feelings and emotions (Horton, 2021). The research methods chosen are also often as much to do with a researcher's life experiences, values, beliefs and feelings as it is to do with the type of knowledge and the understandings that the research requires. It is through our own personal life experiences and the knowledge this has produced that we come to understand and empathise with the experience of others. However, as Pink points out, 'modes of empathetic understanding do not necessarily represent what others actually feel, but enable us to engage our own experiences to understand and probe' (2021, p. 48) the experiences of others. In addition, she identifies how different elements of researchers' identities situate the researcher in their research context. How researchers represent these identities to research participants, how those researched perceive those identities and are understood by them, has implications for the knowledge that is produced. Part of reflexivity is appreciating the nature of the encounter between the researchers and participants and how it is understood by both. This is what Hitchings and Latham (2020) call the small 'p' positionality issues that permeate our practice and rarely appear in the literature.

In order to foreground my positionality and how it is entangled with the main themes in this research there is a *personal story* at the beginning of each chapter. The personal stories are composed in order to allow a philosophical self-reflection and methodological self-consciousness and self-criticism. This is in order to make my life experiences, values and beliefs transparent in relation to that research theme, recognising that in activist participatory research appreciation of the researcher's positionality and their reflexivity are critical (Winchester and Rofe, 2010). As England argues 'fieldwork²⁰ is intensely personal, in that the positionality and biography of the researcher plays a central role in the research process, in the

²⁰ England uses the term fieldwork as a shorthand for those research methods where the researcher directly confronts those who are researched

field as well as in the final text' (1994, p. 251-252). The personal characteristics of the researcher allows for certain insights, and as a consequence some researchers grasp some phenomena more easily and better than others. My positionality also engages some of the tensions in this research and is explored in relation to the particular and specific conclusions that are drawn from this research here, in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 and in the conclusion in chapter 8. These tensions include the roles of activist and academic, the situatedness as an activist in an XR affinity group working within a borough-based group and the affinities and disaffinities with other activists.

My biography, as a white man with decades of experience of working with local communities in London and Hackney, allowed me to share these experiences with other activists to build trust and camaraderie. It gave me some understanding of the diversity in the community and its tensions and cohesions, traditions of local activisms and histories of local protest. XR, as an organisation with protest participation that is highly feminised (Saunders, et al., 2020), made me aware of being a male activist and how that would influence my interpretation of activist practices. As an older person my generational position and perceptions created interesting conversations about previous activist experiences and solidarities but also space and gaps with some younger members of XR. For example, in being mistaken as another activist's father or understanding or initially misunderstanding different framings and language. My involvement in different activisms historically and contemporarily in different places gave me understanding and insights into some aspects of these contemporary activisms. It built trust with some other activists but also opened up spaces and tensions. I explore in chapter three how being an XR rebel made me feel different from other activisms that I have been engaged with over the years and what the implications of this are. This positionality and resulting limitations, tensions and opportunities explain and support both the methods chosen and the episodic structure of the thesis, which seeks to explore the importance of these different strands in mundane activism and draw them together to understand their coherence in these everyday activisms.

The implications of disruption to this research

The majority of this project has been undertaken during a pandemic which at times placed restrictions on leaving your home and where and who you could meet. It also had a range of other impacts on the personal circumstances of citizens in the UK differentially and sometimes in subtle but constraining ways. The unexpected will occur during the course of most social research, given the unpredictable and changing nature of the social world or the changing personal circumstances of the researchers. However, major disruption to research is not commonplace and therefore is relatively sparsely covered in the literature. Most of this literature describes how these crises-related disruptions forced substantial refocusing of the research or the utilisation of different methodologies and methods to circumvent the challenges. Others describe substantial delays or abandonment of research projects. (Chambers, 2020; Roxburgh et al., 2020). The published literature on research disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic almost exclusively focus on those practical issues of maintaining or adapting the research and the majority on how to successfully move to appropriate online platforms for data collection (Dodds and Hess, 2020; Lobe et al., 2020). Although they identify that 'qualitative researchers face unique opportunities and challenges as a result of the disruption of COVID-19' (Lobe et al., 2020, p. 1), they spend little time on identifying and examining what these opportunities may be. Because many researchers have faced disruption during the pandemic, most research institutions have issued advice about project redesign. This guidance suggests that for most projects this redesign should be relatively easy and may actually have some opportunities and benefits.

Previously in this chapter I mentioned that I had to cancel all my planned face to face semi-structured interviews because I was not allowed to leave the house during the time they were originally scheduled to take place. Having thought carefully about moving to online or telephone interviews and rescheduling them, given who my interviewees were and my personal assessment of potential harms, I could not convince myself that this would have been ethical within the timescale of the project. So, the pandemic has impacted this research in this quite obvious way but I wanted to reflect on other impacts that may be more subtle and less obvious. Reflecting upon this I have asked myself: What did I learn about the impact of the pandemic on this research, on navigating this disruption generally and its implications for ethical

practise? Below I list my answers to this question which helps to explain the form of the thesis that follows:

- Knowing when to stop data gathering is not an easy or straightforward matter in ethnography or activist participatory research. The nature of this research method valuing what might emerge, often does not have a clear and obvious endpoint (Bryman, 2016). The pandemic defined the endpoint for the data collection in this research which I had not been clear about previously.
- The pandemic highlighted the different sorts of participation in Activist Participatory Research including online.
- The pandemic made me realise that the scope of my original research project was too large to be able to be completed within the timescale of this PhD thesis.
- The pandemic threw up new and different ethical issues that needed to be navigated in new ways. There was an even greater responsibility on the individual researcher to be reflexive. I had uncertainties about my ability to understand harm and assess risk in this changed world. The question: How can I continue with my research? Being only asked after; Should I continue at all? The pandemic and its impacts made me ask. Are there more important things for people now, in the moment? It made me think again about what was important to me, what I valued and my positionality. I thought more about research participants staying physically and mentally safe.
- The pandemic raised questions about the value and importance of this research? I asked myself. After the pandemic will this research be more or less important?
- The research redesign resulted in the project having more focus on methodology and methods. More documentary and textual analysis. It became more reliant on understanding the significance of images and moments.
- I had to give more consideration to how meeting online, rather than face to face, affects the data and what is gained and lost from immersion and meeting face to face.
- I tried to think about and examine what change is possible in a pandemic.

- It gave me the opportunity to observe activists doing activism only online during periods when meeting and taking actions together was not possible. It highlighted the difference between individual and collective activisms and what is lost when embodied activisms are constrained.
- The pandemic gave me more time to be reflexive but also more to be reflexive about.
- The pandemic, especially during lockdowns, gave me an intense feeling of vulnerability, loss, grief and powerlessness which allowed me to explore these emotions in relation to my research.
- I was given advice from a senior colleague to 'Practise modesty' and I tried to think what this may mean for my research.
- I observed the impact of the pandemic on other activists ...some became more active and prepared to take more risks.... others became less active and disappeared.
- I noticed how the fracture allowed new beginnings when personal and connected activisms restarted.

The pandemic caused disruption in this research on social change. It led to redesigning the research project which presented difficulties, opportunities and learning implications for the research questions, design, rigour, objectivity, and knowledge production. There may be significant further research opportunities to consider and understand in more detail the wider implications of the pandemic disruption on social research and what it exposed but I have decided not to address this directly here.

Conclusion

This chapter reflects upon the methodology used in this activist participatory research of XR in London before and after the declaration of a pandemic by the World Health Organisation on 11 March 2020 (World Health Organisation, 2020). It identifies the methodology and methods chosen to meet the research aims and objectives and address the research question. The methodology and methods were chosen to make sense of this activisms' messiness, rather than attempting to tidy it up and sanitise these messy social processes. This messiness of XR on the streets of London was fast moving with entanglements of place, feelings, emotions, affect,

difference, effectiveness, sound and performance which shaped the structure and chapters in this thesis.

Although honing existing and established research methods in human geography is important, it should not distract from researchers being alive to serendipitous research methods emerging. This chapter identifies the importance of exploiting serendipitous methods that emerge during the research process such as *activist Smartphone doings* and the value of *activism from below* in understanding how difference is managed in *day-to-day* activism in the *here and now*. Understanding the activism on the *streets* and the other *organising spaces*, where the activism is situated and not from *above* or from the *side*. It is useful in understanding place, as a process for use on the move, as a method giving insights into *moments* of action and intensity. A fuller analysis and laying claim to the use of *activist Smartphone doings* in participatory research as a multi centred/multi place methodology whose use allows greater understanding at that time is in the final chapter of this thesis. It explains why this method is particularly suited to activist research and its contemporaneous understanding by demonstrating how the methodology helped answer the research question and its aims and objectives.

The chapter identifies the ethical issues and what was learnt about ethical practice during a pandemic. In geographical research the consideration of what is ethical research has tended to focus on assessing risk and harm with a view to reducing it and having no negative impacts, but less about the need to make and have positive impacts (Pain, 2004). This chapter sets out an approach to navigating ethical practice that is transparent, accountable but also pragmatic. Finally, the chapter raises questions, some of which it answers, about the impact, difficulties and opportunities of research disruption. It identifies that there is still important research to be done to uncover and explore the impacts, difficulties and opportunities from disruption in social research and the potential of unique learning from the pandemic disruption.

Chapter 3

History

The start of the shift for the beekeepers at the Trafalgar Square/Strand blockade. Looking up at the figure of Nelson on his column: This is a place of history making history.... The hearse is still blocking the Whitehall entrance to Trafalgar Square surrounded by seated protestors with a 'now or never' banner at their feet.... A young woman at the blockade tells me about her police girlfriend of three months. She can't get arrested. She may be deported, and her girlfriend would have to be vetted. I showed her the link to my Sheffield PhD webpage. I wander around the site and talk to an artist who later arrives as a steward at the blockade. I see Martin Rowson's cartoon of the Prime Minister Boris Johnson propped up against a lamppost. The cartoon has his trousers around his ankles. Johnson described us as uncooperative crusties and the denizens of heaving hemp smelling bivouacs. He is not a serious politician for these serious times. Funny how it's just another stereotype to obfuscate and diminish the importance of action on the climate emergency. Here we go again!.... (Field Diary 09.10.2019).



Figure 6: Photograph of a cartoon of the Prime Minister Boris Johnson in Trafalgar square (Source author).

This chapter examines how these XR activisms can be understood in relation to historical British environmentalism. It argues that these XR activisms, as a

contemporary manifestation of environmental activism, has built upon and learnt from historical environmental activism, particularly its more radical expressions, and XR's emergence in October 2018, as well as its strategy and tactics, are best understood in this context. Often what is considered central or core to UK environmentalism is that which is most visible and therefore deemed more important. I have identified and chosen eight key features of British environmentalism since the 1970's to frame this analysis. Many of these characteristics overlap and act together to shape the activism. I could have chosen others, for example the dynamics of how activists choose the targets of their protest, but I have included within these characteristics aspects that are less visible in this history but nonetheless important. These contextualising characteristics are: Firstly, the long-standing tension between reformist and radical environmentalisms. Secondly, radical activists are often perceived via the lens of particular stereotypes, lifestyles and subcultures. Thirdly, there is a significant focus in British environmentalisms on scales including the global, national, regional and local. Fourthly there has been an evolution of the topics of environmental concerns, often with a rearticulation of existing concerns, but in new language and terms. Fifthly British environmentalisms have often been perplexed by their lack of diversity and difference. Sixthly UK environmentalisms have never been easy to define with fluid and overlapping boundaries, sometimes conjoined and sometimes separate. Seventh, radical environmental movements have a pattern of emerging, developing, having differential impacts and then either becoming reformist, marginal or disappearing completely. Lastly, activism has developed a repertoire of tactics over time, which are drawn upon and developed by new manifestations, but sometimes in different and unusual ways.

This chapter identifies and examines similarities to, and differences from, these environmental activism characteristics that help to understand XR and what it does, including its impact. It also introduces the concept of *patterns of serendipity*. This is the role that lucky accidents play in impactful activism and argues for understanding its significance in the analysis of successful environmental movements. The analysis in subsequent chapters draw upon these characteristics and history, the insights from social movement theory, as well as the key current environmental debates and perspectives which are outlined in chapter one.

Tension between reformist and radical environmentalisms

There has been a long-standing tension in British environmentalisms between its reformist and radical manifestations which is not always replicated in other countries. Although many environmental activists may recognise similar environmental concerns their understanding of the causes of these problems and potential solutions may be fundamentally different. There are therefore often fault lines and tensions between groups that campaign for reform of the system, often striving for 'sustainable development', and those seeking radical and deep-seated structural transformation (Doyle et al., 2016, p. 53). In seeking to understand these different environmental organisations and networks, Trantor describes the reformists as 'conservation groups' and the radicals as 'ecologist groups' (2010, p. 415). Whereas Saunders (2008) identified three types of environmental organisations. The first type as *conservationist* often being locally focused, the second *reformist* working nationally and/or internationally and the third *radical* often being loose networks of direct-action activists.

There is a long history of environmentalisms in the UK, but towards the end of the 1960's and at the beginning of the 1970's 'new environmental groups emerged in most western countries' (Doherty, 2002, p. 29). This new activism was the 'first new cross-national wave of environmentalism since the late nineteenth century when conservation and animal welfare groups had been formed' (Doherty, 2002, p. 29). These environmental groups were *new* in the sense that they linked structural problems in societies in minority world countries, and the finite nature of the earth's resources, to environmental problems (Dobson, 2000).

In the UK over the last sixty years, hundreds of environmental organisations and networks have been formed (Environmental Funders Network, 2013) and many of these NGO's have played a role in shaping the environmental debate. There are obviously many histories of British environmentalisms that could be written from the perspective of any one of these organisations, each of which may tell a different story. For example, Surfers against Sewage are *Ocean Activists* who describe themselves as an 'engaged and empowered community of Ocean Activists teams across the UK taking collective and impactful action to restore the ocean' (Sewage, 2021). The Black Environmental Network (BEN) on the other hand works to enable

full ethnic participation, in the built and natural environment, positioning itself as a catalyst for change, to enable access to the enormous services, resources and expertise within mainstream organisations and institutions (Network, 2021). The three British environmental NGO's central to the mainstream British environmental movement since the 1970's, are the World Wide Fund for Nature²¹ (WWF), Friends of the Earth (FoE) and Greenpeace. They have become important political actors in today's environmental debates and their history still shapes their organisational cultures and focus (Rootes, 2006).

The WWF formed in 1961 out of a previous conservation organisation that had been set up to assist UNESCO (Doherty, 2002). The WWF continues to seek to conserve endangered species and protect threatened habitats, but 'now does so by finding long term solutions that benefit both people and nature and makes explicit the connection between poverty and environmental degradation' (Rootes, 2006, p. 769). The WWF has become ever more 'committed to an agenda of sustainable development' (Doherty, 2006, p. 709). Despite developments in the focus of its activities it remains firmly on the conservative wing of the environmental movement.

The UK FoE, formed in 1971, first made 'itself a public name by dumping hundreds of non-returnable bottles on Schweppes' doorstep', but over the years has tried to build a reputation as a well-informed organisation, basing action on research and developing 'an increasingly professional team of staff' (Saunders, 2008, 237). FoE has a more ideological agenda than the WWF and 'now presents itself as an organisation at least as much concerned with global justice as conservation' (Rootes, 2006, 769). As an organisation that organises nationally, it is made up of local groups with distinct concerns and focuses. Its previous Chief Executive, Craig Bennett, actively supported XR and encouraged FOE members to do the same.

Greenpeace was originally the organisation with the most international focus and has changed the least. Greenpeace UK formed in 1977 and because the original activists included experienced journalists their 'actions were therefore especially media orientated' (Doherty et al., 2000, p. 6). Greenpeace UK still takes direct action and

²¹ Formally the World Wildlife Fund

uses the media extensively with high profile action; 'We investigate, expose and confront environmental abuse by governments and corporations around the world' (Greenpeace UK, 2018). Its strategy is to work less than the other major UK environmental organisations through coalitions, and 'to avoid broad ideological commitments in favour of clearly specified issue-based campaigns' (Doherty, 2006, p. 710). Greenpeace UK also coordinates activities and actions with XR despite a history of tensions between one of the founder members of XR (Roger Hallam) and John Sauven the Executive Director of Greenpeace during 2019 and 2020, about Greenpeace's strategy and tactics (Rebel film unit, 2019). Greenpeace members also take part in XR actions and vice versa. Below is an extract from XR's *Newsletter 22- get ready for a civil summer!* published on the 30 May 2019.

Last week, Greenpeace activists blocked entrances to the BP London headquarters with five large concrete containers, each holding a pair of Greenpeace activists. The brave activists planned to live in these tiny containers for up to a week, and arrived with a supply of food, water and Netflix. Unfortunately arrest came quickly and the blockade was removed by the evening. We salute Greenpeace's boldness and their courage to take risks, even if it could result in significant personal sacrifice. The world is rebelling. XR rebels, Greenpeace activists and youth strikers, we stand together (Rebellion, 2019).

My research has identified multi layered relationships between XR and Greenpeace that continues the tradition of both tensions as well as cooperation between mainstream and radical environmental organisations and networks.

Went to the non-violent direct action training at the Castle climbing centre at Green Lanes which finished about 9.00 pm....The beekeepers decamped to the Brownswood pub to talk about the Easter rebellion..... I talked to everyone about my PhD research. Three of the affinity group members said that they were also members of Greenpeace before they decided to get involved with XR (Field Diary 07.04.2019).

Greenpeace have just shutdown BP again and been served with an injunction. G1 mentions that he's also active with XR and Greenpeace take direct action too! It reminds me about one of XR's first actions that was to occupy Greenpeace's head office. I wonder what impact XR's actions has had on Greenpeace and other environmental organisations. It seems to have

made them more active and focused on climate issues (Field Diary 10.06.2019).

The major environmental NGO's have changed differentially since they formed but all have developed different political ideologies and seek not just to influence the state, but also corporations and individual citizens and consumers. Doherty et al identified that 'the 1990's saw substantial changes in the character of British environmentalism' (2000, p. 1) and that after a decade of increasing professionalisation of environmental organisations and the increasing legitimacy of those organisations with state policy makers, 'environmentalism in the UK suddenly seemed to take a radical turn' (2000, p. 1). In the same way that Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace were themselves a pivotal response to the stolid environmental NGO's of the 1970's. These new environmental groups or networks that emerged in Britain in the early 1990's were often focused on local environmental campaigns (Doherty, 2002). Although they were place based, they were more than local and often global in intent. Doherty draws out the difference between these new groups and local conservation groups and NGO's. Their protest was strategically aimed at 'bringing about comprehensive social and political change' in order to establish a radical green society and they rejected the efforts of existing environmental organisations 'as inadequate or, at best, insufficient to deal with the environmental crisis' (Doherty, 2002, p. 155). Most took direct action 'as a response to the institutionalisation and professionalisation' of the NGO's (Seel and Plows, 2000, p. 117). One of the first of these groups to emerge was Earth First! (EF!) in 1991. EF! is a non-hierarchical organisation that uses:

direct action to confront, stop and eventually reverse the forces that are responsible for the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants. EF! is not a cohesive group or campaign, but a convenient banner for people who share similar philosophies to work under (Earth First!, 2015).

The initial targets for their action were the 'importers of tropical hardwoods' and 'those causing direct environmental damage' such as Tesco and Tarmac Construction (Doherty, 2002, p. 166). However, it was not until they became involved in protesting against road building that the movement grew and was able to make a significant political impact. By 1997 there were sixty active EF! groups and the 1997

summer gathering was attended by about four hundred activists. However, because it has no formal membership or hierarchy and 'a lack of distinction between EF! and the wider eco-protest movement' it is difficult to estimate its size at any one time (Doherty, 1998, p. 376). Although it is important to stress the multiple overlaps between different eco protest groups and movements, these radical groups had a relatively small number of core activists in relation to other environmental organisations. This is often not highlighted in the literature when assessing their importance and impact. It was groups such as Earth First! that subsequently developed into a broader range of anti-capitalist movements.

My research has identified that these XR activists are a contemporary manifestation of a response to the institutionalisation of NGO's. On 21 June 2019 S1 had a court appearance at Hendon magistrate's court. Waiting for his case to be called on, S1 and a group of us, chatted about how environmental organisations 'didn't seem to understand that this is an emergency...they just sit around in offices' (Field Diary 21.06.2019). S1 subsequently sent me an e-mail 'Hi Stephen...This movement takes ACTION. Other organisations now sit on the side-lines and watch....Truth, love and passion S1' (Field Diary 21.06.2021). Interestingly, most environmental organisations strongly agree that non-violent direct action has an essential role to play in addressing environmental challenges. This is even if their organisation does not use direct action as one of their tactics and despite defenders of the status quo often suggesting that the use of direct action discourages participation in environmentalism and discredits the sector as a whole (Environmental Funders Network, 2013).

Many environmental and activist organisations, particularly those that create a profile or get traction in the public sphere, face criticisms from those who oppose their objectives or tactics or seek to persuade them to align their objectives more closely with their own. There have been criticisms of XR since it burst onto the scene in October 2018. Some of the criticisms are from diametrically opposed positions for example XR is far too radical: or not nearly radical enough, however many of the criticisms are overlapping and relate to XR's strategy and tactics. Reviewing these criticisms, the position of XR in relation to historical and contemporary activism of environmentalism becomes clearer (Out of the woods, 2019; Wretched of the Earth,

2019). Radical climate movements have faced similar criticisms and tensions before. Russell (2014) in explaining that the radical climate movement grew exponentially in size profile and frequency of actions, notices voices within the movement that warned of a tendency towards becoming a dramatic single issue mass lobby for punitive state intervention.

In other words for some in the movement there was an active concern with maintaining a distinction between 'radical' praxis and the wider environmental movement, and of seeing the latter as in some way flawed, lacking or 'un-radical' as it were 'Friends of the Earth with D-lock's (Russell, 2014, p. 223).

Wretched of the Earth argue that XR's third demand to move *Beyond politics* is not possible and espousing no party-political affiliation affiliations is naïve. However, there are at least two drivers for XR in adopting this approach to *politics*. The first is to model deliberative democracy unlocking debate and vested interest by using citizens assemblies to make decisions²² and the second not to be seen as an organisation with party political affiliations or a political identity so that the movement can accommodate a broad range of political opinions of people who want to take action on the climate and ecological emergency.

Some of the strongest challenges to XR come from other established activist groups and campaigners on other issues. These criticisms coalesce about an argument that XR misses the point by ignoring the fundamental causes of climate change. XR in focusing on climate change is addressing the symptoms and not the disease and therefore at best will only be a palliative rather than a curative solution. They argue that we cannot construct or imagine a different future until we understand how the present has been constructed via capitalist economic structures, racism, sexism and classism. Like those critics of XR's demand to move beyond politics, they argue that the climate crisis is the result of neoliberal capitalism, and a global system of extraction, dispossession and oppression and is inseparable from these causes (Ahmed, 2019; Out of the Woods, 2019). The characteristic of environmentalisms

²² The nature, rhetoric and practice of citizens assemblies, the development of the process and practice of peoples' assemblies during 2019 and 2020 and their importance to the experience of XR at a local level is examined in detail on page 73 and 74.

concerns about difference and diversity and how it is expressed in its movements is addressed in more detail in a subsequent section of this chapter Berglund ²³and Schmidt (2020) in their book *Extinction Rebellion and Climate Change Activism: Breaking the law to change the world* seek to answer the question: is XR a reformist or a revolutionary movement? They frame this question in terms of: Are they activists campaigning to pressure governments to address climate change or campaigning to replace the state with something different? They conclude that the answer to this question is not obvious, with tensions in the organisation and a different answer depending upon who you ask with inside XR itself. My research identifies that these reformist/radical tensions continue in contemporary environmentalisms, not only between activists and organisations but also within activist organisations. XR activists want immediate action on the climate emergency, as well as a different way in which the country is governed, and decisions made. This is because they conclude that the current national governance arrangements have proved completely inadequate to deal with this the largest issue facing the country.

Radical activist stereotypes

Radical activists are often perceived to be particular and certain stereotypes or adopting alternative lifestyles and part of a distinct subculture. These perspectives are often given life and prominence in the echo chambers of the mainstream media and conservative politics. The peace movement during the 1980's produced a significant and extensive campaign of countercultural direct action based around peace camps with perhaps the most famous being the Greenham Common women's peace camp. This protest camp against nuclear weapons at RAF Greenham Common in Berkshire began in September 1981 and became a women only camp in February 1992. Tim Cresswell (1994) in his study *Putting women in their place: The carnival at Greenham Common* details how the mainstream press developed and promoted stereotypes of the women and how the camp developed a distinct counterculture with an alternative lifestyle. The media sought to create stereotyping

²³ Berglund has also produced a YouTube video on Climate Protests and Civil Disobedience https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_7pGfRnZao&ab_channel=CabotInstitutefortheEnvironment&link_id=27&can_id=6d94cf0e5267e849e07c825cfa9b4f3a&source=email-london-newsletter-59&email_referrer=email_1052161&email_subject=london-newsletter-60

about dirt and smell, filth muck and squalor, dirty kitchens and women of deviance, promiscuity and hysteria. Environmental groups such as Greenpeace, although they use direct action, do not have the counter cultural ethos, commitment to non-hierarchical forms of organisation nor the radical ideology of new environmental movements that emerged in the 1990's. In analysing these emerging movements, Doherty identifies that these activists and their protest actions were 'rooted in an alternative culture' (2002, p. 155). As mentioned previously, one of the first of these counter cultural direct action networks to emerge in the UK was Earth First! (EF!) in 1991. At the Twyford Down protest against the M3 motorway extension in 1982 an iconic countercultural group emerged who called themselves the Dongas tribe, after the medieval trackways that crossed the Down. They developed an alternative lifestyle with a tribal identity and nomadic way of life, used dragon symbols, drew boundary circles and invoked the power of magic to defend their site:

Protest by counter cultural groups captured the attention of the media, reaching its apogee in the cultivation of Swampy and a few other protesters as symbolic referents for idealistic youth in 1997 (Doherty, 2002, p. 167).

Most of the activists in these new environmental direct action groups were young, middle class, university educated, with many new to political activism (Wall, 1999). Jump forward thirty years to contemporary activisms and these historical stereotypes are in places being challenged. For example, the Lancashire Nanas is a local single issue activist group protesting against a plan by Cuadrilla to extract shale gas in Fylde Lancashire. They are grandmothers that take direct action, with many of them being arrested during actions:

For three weeks the Nanas, their children and grandchildren, occupied the field, drawing widespread support from the local community as well as activists from around the country (Pidd, 2015).

The Lancashire Nanas remind us about the stereotypes of anti-road protestors of the 1990's by contrasting with that stereotype. They are of a different generation, part of mainstream society and culture whilst undertaking civil disobedience to protect their local community.

Almost 20 years after Swampy climbed a tree to protest against the building of the Newbury bypass, he remains the popular image of an environmental protester: dreadlocks, camouflage jacket, tie-dye, a grubby roll-up in one hand and juggling balls in the other. Yet many of the key players behind the Lancastrian victory this week could not be further from that stereotype (Pidd, 2015).

Another example of a challenge to those stereotypes emerged during 2019 with school age activists, Fridays for Future, reaching an unprecedented scale and co-ordination of mobilisation on the climate emergency (de Moor et al., 2020).

Through a school strike, a new generation has been galvanized, representing a historical turn in climate activism. This wave of climate protest mobilization is unique in its tactics, global scope and appeal to teenage school students (Wahlstrom et al., 2019, p. 5).

However, my research of XR challenges the stereotypes of radical environmental activism being primarily an activity of youth in two ways. Firstly, older activists make up a large proportion of XR activists and I found many examples of older and younger activists taking action together. Chapter five examines how in addition to committed *recycled* activists, XR has also attracted a significant proportion of people, of different generations, that have never taken actions before or considered themselves activists who take action together.

Another stereotype or trope that has been applied to radical environmental activists, particularly by conservative or right-wing politics, is that they are revolutionaries or eco-terrorists that are seeking to overthrow the state and they are in fact violent or are planning violence (Doherty, 2002). Sometimes this is focused on the leadership of an organisation with other activists being portrayed as naive and sometimes at the whole organisation. A contemporary manifestation of this is a report called *Extremism Rebellion* by Policy Exchange, a UK-based right wing think tank, that concluded XR is an extremist/terrorist organisation and claimed that XR was seeking the breakdown of liberal democracy and the rule of law.

Extinction Rebellion is an extremist organisation whose methods need to be confronted and challenged rather than supported and condoned. If we fail to

confront those who incite and encourage mass law-breaking, we fail in our duty to confront extremism. This new form of extremism needs to be tackled by Ministers and politicians, the Commission for Countering Extremism, police and the general public. (Policy Exchange, 2019 p. 5).

This puts XR in the same place as neo-Nazi and Islamist terrorist groups. Perhaps it is unsurprising that the authors chosen by the Policy Exchange found XR to be a terrorist/extremist organization because the two people Policy Exchange chose to author the report on their behalf were the former head of the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command and the head of their extremism unit.

I heard Richard Walton, a former head of the Metropolitan Police counter terrorism command SO 15 being interviewed on the radio this morning about his report which reviewed the ideology and tactics of Extinction Rebellion. He said “it is very clear they are a hard-core anarchist group that want to break up our democracy... they have a long term intention of breaking up the state. I would describe this as anarchism with a smile... many of the activists don't understand the wider agenda of the leadership of Extinction Rebellion (Field Diary 17.07.2019).

During my research, although I encountered considerable debate about what actually amounted to non-violent action, I found no evidence that XR's commitment to non-violence was not genuine and deep-rooted. I found broad acceptance about the importance of the issues XR is campaigning about, that protest is considered an indicator of a vibrant democracy, and among environmental organisations that non-violent direct action was considered an important tactic to seek change. Despite this some political groups consider labelling radical activists as revolutionary or terrorist organisations politically useful. It seeks to distract attention from the campaign issues promoted by the activists, encourage state and police surveillance and repression and dissuade more people from joining, signing up and participating.

XR activists self-identify as rebels. The purpose and practice of *rebellious* grew out of the precursor organisation to XR which was Rising Up! If you frame the action that needs to be taken as a '*rebellion* against our government and the corrupted, inept institutions that threaten our future' (Farrell, et al., 2019, p. 2), then those activists who participate in action framed as rebellion frame themselves as rebels with a right

and duty to rebel. In a rebellion those participating are rebels and this is an identity that is different to being an activist or protestor. XR's website frames rebellion as inevitable, against a system and demanding a changed future. Being a rebel gives each individual a responsibility to act urgently and when acting collectively to fight for transformational change and envision it as a possible future.

We have no other choice. We rebel against the system that got us here. We rebel for the future we want. We rebelled because it is our responsibility to act. We have no more time to waste. Nothing is impossible we can still write the story we want and we will. We as individuals can make a difference, collectively. We will do this together transform the world, create lasting change and build a better future for all (Extinction Rebellion, 2020)

The Rebel agreement (below) that was given to activists including me before the Easter 2019 rebellion and was followed by all activists during actions I was part of.

Rebel agreement

All Rebels are asked to follow our basic agreement. It provides a basis for trust so that we and the public know what we can expect of each other.

1. We show **respect to everyone** - to each other, the general public and to the government and police.
2. We engage in **no violence**, physical or verbal.
3. We carry **no weapons** and wear **no masks** - we hold ourselves accountable for our actions.
4. We bring **no alcohol** or illegal drugs.
5. We **take responsibility** for ourselves we are all crew

Being a rebel made me feel different from other activism that I have engaged with over the years. There was an impact both collectively and individually in being identified as a rebel involved in a rebellion rather than a protester attending a march. It engaged feelings of agency, purpose, urgency and as a more nuanced response to criminal and inhuman action. The rebel agreement brought clarity to the performance and practice of being a rebel and reinforced practice consistent with XR's espoused theory of change. The rebel agreement was a noticeable component of creating a collective identity amongst activists. It was broadly accepted as

empowering and protective rather than being controlling and prescriptive. It promoted solidarity, *we are all crew*, and those behaviours that demonstrated individual and collective accountability, *we carry no weapons and wear no masks*.

Despite violence in environmental protests over the years 'being notable by its absence' (Rootes, 2000, p. 38) debates about whether violence should play a role in radical environmental activism ebb and flow. The violence-non-violence debate, known as *spiky-fluffy*, was common in the 1990's (Seel and Plows, 2000). Malm's (2021) book *How to Blow Up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire* has rekindled the debate on the left about direct action tactics and eco-sabotage with a call for the environmental movement to start sabotaging fossil fuel infrastructure to save our planet (Ffitch, 2022). However, XR as a radical group continues to require members who take action to be exclusively non-violent. It is something that is constantly and consistently reinforced during all of XR's major actions.

Still at Waterloo in the gardens this morning. Another lovely day. In wandering about first thing, I notice again that there is such a constant reinforcement about drugs, alcohol and non violent behaviour. Reinforcing the approach that is all about calm and not responding despite violence towards activists which is both physical, social and intimidatory (Field Diary 16.07.2019).

Being unrealistic and alarmist is another stereotyping of environmental activists. Applying the *unrealistic* and unnecessary stereotype to XR attempts to highlight that the demand of net zero carbon emissions by 2025 is not possible. That it is 'an ambition that technically, economically and politically has absolutely no chance of being fulfilled' (Forbes, 2019). The Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit points to the implications of moving to net zero by 2025 that would include the scrapping of flying and all petrol and diesel cars and all gas boilers providing domestic heating by that date. XR's argument is that the 2025 target is what needs to be done to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels and what is realistic depends on how urgent you think the problem is you need to solve and therefore what action you are prepared to take. If the climate emergency was given the same priority as, lets say, developing a vaccine for COVID19 and immunising all sixty million people in the UK, who knows what may be possible? XR is also criticised for being alarmist. Impactful activism, it is argued, should focus on hope and not

hopelessness and despair. By making action on climate change seem hopeless or pointless you demotivate and stop people getting involved and taking action. However very often people are motivated to act not by logical argument but by an appeal to their emotions and a key part of XR's strategy is to invoke both the logical and the emotional. There is obviously a fine line between persuading people that things are so urgent that action is needed immediately and things have already gone so far that feelings of hopelessness and inaction are generated. The importance of emotions, feelings and affect in activism are explored in detail in chapter six.

I saw a retweet from Extinction Rebellion by George Monbiot today at lunchtime about stereotyping of environmental activists to undermine any claims they make about the climate emergency. "If you are middle class, they call you a champagne socialist. If you are working class, they say it's the politics of envy. If you wear leather shoes, they call you a hypocrite. If you don't, they call you a hippie. Everyone, apparently, is disqualified from challenging the system" (Field Diary 16.07.2019).

The stereotyping of contemporary environmental activism continues in many forms both in the mainstream media and conservative politics. I came across a cartoon of the Prime minister by Martin Rowson in Trafalgar Square during the October 2019 rebellion. The cartoon encapsulated the stereotype of people with alternative lifestyles, living in countercultural bivouacs, whose actions are driven, encouraged and maintained by illegal drugs. This history of stereotyping in a place of history is examined in detail in chapter four.

Scales of environmentalisms

There is a significant intersection between scales of environmentalisms. Environmental concerns and activism are global, national, regional and local and often interconnected and interdependent. Environmental issues are increasingly global, from climate change to waste plastic packaging in the marine environment, but despite this they become manifest, and articulated as problems, in specific places (Rootes, 2005). There are complicated relations, and interrelations, between local, national and international contention in environmental activism. Rootes identifies local campaigns as the 'most persistent and ubiquitous forms of environmental contention' whilst 'national and international mobilisations come and

go and the attention they receive from mass media ebbs and flows' (2007, p. 722). Rootes also highlights the way in which local activism can connect with and re-invigorate national organisations; 'yet local environmental campaigns have been relatively neglected in the scientific literature' (2007, p. 723). However, literature that identifies and focuses on the local without its other spatial connection is too limited because the local has always been interconnected with and been shaped by global environmental movements. Environmentalisms are increasingly global with many being part of an interwoven global history rather than being only local in character. Environmental movements in different countries influence each other. For example, the histories of Earth first! in America and Earth First! in the UK or Friends of the Earth in America and Friends of the Earth in the UK are intertwined. (Seel and Plows, 2000; Doherty, 2002).

Doherty et al's (2007) rare study demonstrates that local activist groups are involved in direct action about local, national and international issues²⁴. The histogram in Figure 7 identifies the number of events captured in the study, the number of events

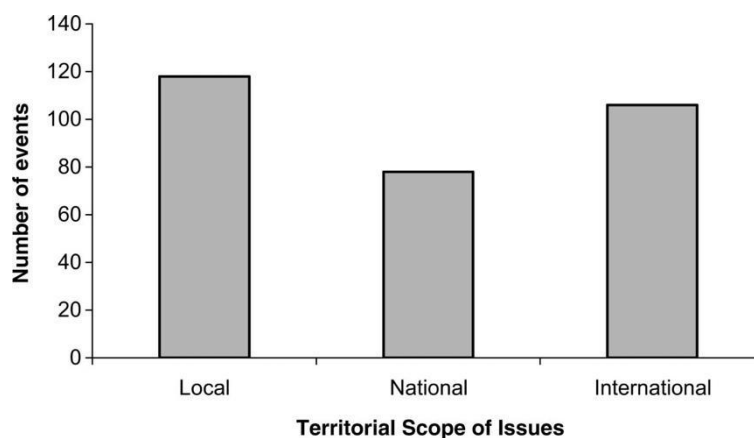


Figure 7: Scope of issues subject to specific claims made in protests (Doherty et al., 2007, p. 815).

²⁴ A single event was only classified in one category. For instance, in Manchester activists took part in protests against the closure of a school and the destruction of a pond in part of the city where most activists lived, events that were clearly local in scope. Events of national scope included demonstrations organised to disrupt the visit of the Home Secretary. An example of an event in Manchester of international scope was a blockade to disrupt an international conference of government ministers and business leaders.

linked to local, national and international issues which highlights the importance of local issues in environmental activism and vice versa. In understanding this dimension of environmentalisms, XR has developed local geographical groups to organise around and take action about climate related issues of local community concern; regional and national groups to challenge elected representatives and persuade corporations to change tack as well national groups interested in specific environmental topics.

The summer uprising on the theme of Act now starts today. Five cities are targeted across the UK, each given meaning for that place. Glasgow the future you fear is already here. Leeds divestment from fossil fuels and investment in renewable energy. Cardiff saving lives now and in the future. Bristol sea levels are rising and so are we. London we are nature defending itself..... I see that Shell and the stock exchange is due to be targeted as well (Field Diary 14.07.2019).

During 2019 XR mainly targeted major cities, including London, or organisations that finance or extract fossil fuels. During mass and sustained actions, targeted a number of major cities, the funders and the extractors of fossil fuels at the same time. The scale upon which they operated was local and regional but global in intent. So local actions were never essentially only about local issues. For example, even if local air pollution in Tower Hamlets was the flag to rally around in that place or locality, the action was aimed at the full range of spatial scales. One of the challenges for XR activists was to shine a spotlight on issues apparent and of concern to people locally and frame them as local examples of the global climate emergency in their locality.

The global nature of the climate emergency informs how activisms and local actions are understood and seen as legitimate or otherwise. For example, some critics of these local XR activisms suggested that the protesting was at the wrong scale, in the wrong place and at the wrong government. Rather than taking direct action in London activists should be protesting in China and other countries responsible for most of the carbon emissions and not in the capital of a country that is a world leader in emissions reduction. On the other hand, the UK independent Committee on Climate change chair Lord Deben has pointed out that the UK is missing many of the targets that it has set itself. Historically the UK is responsible for about 5% of all

global CO₂ emissions and many activists wanted the government to take a leadership role so that the UK had the moral authority to ask other countries to act urgently now. This concept of the UK giving *global leadership* is reflected in XR's campaigns and activists' beliefs. Research also identifies that this narrative is particularly persuasive for those who are undecided about whether or not to take action on climate change (Akehurst & Murphy, 2022).

Since XR launched in October 2018 in London, its aims and objectives, approach and branding were quickly adopted by other activists in countries across the world. This happened so quickly that the October 2019 actions were branded as an *International Rebellion* with coordinated actions across the globe. Although there are now XR movements in most countries across the world, and this gives context to this examination of this local contemporary British environmentalism, XR organisations and their development in other countries does not form part of this research.

Environmental topics of concern

Topics of environmental concern evolve, ebb and flow, but often they are a rearticulation of existing concerns in new language and terms, in a contemporary setting. The history of environmentalism is one in which the environmental issues that are considered important at any one time and the focus for NGO's and activists' attention changes. Although Tarrow's concept of *cycles of contention* predicts these changes, it does not explain why new environmental topics come to the fore, nor how individual activists engage with these topics and the implications for activist movements of articulating broad-based environmental issues or focused issues and objectives. Carter identifies three generations in the evolution of environmental issues which have focused on different environmental topics (Carter, 2007). Table 3 shows the topics that he has identified as important in each generation. Carter notices an increasing globalisation of concerns, such acid rain and ozone depletion, highlighting the global interdependence they manifest in specific places. The evolution of environmental issues in the UK would include the topics identified by Carter, but would also include others such as road building in the 1980's and 1990's. In addition, since Carter compiled this table new global topics, such as plastic packaging and fracking, and the climate emergency have emerged which have gained prominence as topics in UK environmentalism.

| Evolution of environmental issues | |
|--|--|
| First generation: preservation and conservation (pre-1960s) | Protection of wildlife and habitats Soil erosion Local pollution |
| Second generation: 'modern environmentalism' (from 1960s) | Population growth Technology Desertification Pesticides Resource depletion Pollution abatement |
| Third generation: global issues (late 1970s onwards) | Acid rain Ozone depletion Rainforest destruction Climate change Loss of biodiversity Genetically modified organisms |

Table 3: Evolution of environmental topics from the pre-1960's until present (Carter, 2007, p 4).

A new generation of radical topic specific direct action networks began to emerge in the early to mid noughties. Reclaim the Streets (RTS) used street parties to block roads and cause disruption, EF! developed in anti-road protest camps and other networks including Rising Tide and Plane Stupid formed 'to oppose coal mining and airport expansion' (Hunt, 2013 p. 90). XR's activism is focused on dangerous climate change and biodiversity loss. However, other organisations want XR to broaden its focus and its demands. Wretched of the Earth, in an open letter to XR, requires that XR's demands must include: No fracking, free transport, decent housing, democratising corporations, restoring ecosystems, a green deal for the Global South, reparations and redistribution, a write off of debt, Ditching most trade deals and investment agreements, no arms trade, subsidise renewable energy, Freer movement of people and no detention centres, The right to free education, free healthcare and an adequate income (Wretched of The Earth, 2019).

In understanding that many activists have interests in different topics, XR has encouraged and facilitated people to become active in these topics but through the lens of anthropogenic climate change and biodiversity loss. For example, animal rights activists highlight the impact of meat production on global warming and how a move to plant-based diets would reduce the amount of carbon dioxide and methane produced by animal farming. Anti-fracking activists highlight how the additional availability of gas will reduce the urgent need to move rapidly to renewable energy sources. This approach has been complemented by aligning with a wide range of other movements and developing an approach described as a *movement of movements* which is also what anti-capitalism movements were known as in the 1990's. How these different topic specific groups take action together, in the same and different places, is explained and explored in relation to the major London actions during 2019 in chapter four. Doyle et al (2016) argue that UK environmentalism continues to evolve and develop with *climatization* (the domination of the global agenda by climate change) and *transnationalization* of environmental movements facilitated by social media becoming more central to its understanding.

Environmentalisms concern with difference and diversity

Most environmentalisms including British environmentalisms, whether radical or reformist, as well as those who study and write about them, have always been perplexed by their lack of diversity (Mattausch, 1989; Rudig, et al.1991; Eder, 1993; Schlosberg, 1999):

...empirical research carried out in the UK on the memberships of anti nuclear and environmental organisations...' find that they '...are in general relatively affluent, highly educated and rooted in the professional new middle class (McNeish, 2000, p. 188).

Snow (1992) asserts that practically none of the mainstream conservation/environmental groups in the United States, regardless of location, scope, or size-works effectively with or deliberately tries to include people of colour, the rural poor or the politically and economically disenfranchised. XR has provided an alternative space for people to take action, express their concerns and give that activism visibility. Concerns have been raised about diversity and difference in relation to XR and its activists, both by those inside and outside the organisation.

These concerns about diversity and difference are understood and expressed in several different ways. Amongst others they include; XR's hierarchy; the structure of the organisation and how it makes decisions; its tactics and strategy; its relationship with, and the representation of, working class and black communities and its focus on the majority world and the nature of its membership.

As discussed in the introduction XR uses self-organising systems (SOS) for decision making and therefore those in positions to make decisions have not been elected to represent, and therefore reflect, members' views. Democratic organisations, it is argued, should have structures with members electing people to the organisationally powerful positions with accountability for decisions taken to that electorate. XR's structure and organisation promotes empowering individual activists to take action over majority decision making or consensus. Anyone can take action on XRs behalf if they act in accordance with their aims and values. This can mean that individuals or affinity groups can still take actions that most XR activists believe are unwise or would adversely affect disadvantaged communities. For example, a poll taken of XR activists involved in actions in October 2019 about proposed disruption of the underground at Canning Town clearly demonstrated that it was not supported by most activists. Of the 3851 of us who voted only four percent unequivocally supported the action, but it went ahead anyway (Figure 8).

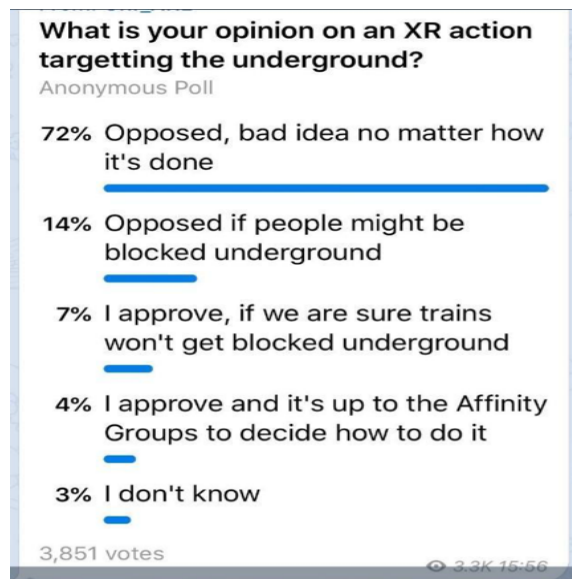


Figure 8: Screenshot of Google poll (Field Diary 10.10.2019)

Many of the people disrupted by this action, in this disadvantaged community in east London, would have been those using public transport to get to work.

XR advocates the use of citizens assemblies to identify, articulate and gain acceptance for the urgent changes needed. The concept of the citizens' assembly promulgated by XR at a strategic level is that of a representative group of citizens who are selected at random²⁵ from the population to receive considered and detailed evidence, deliberate upon that evidence, and make recommendations in relation to a particular issue or set of issues. A citizens' assembly being a form of deliberative democracy: a process through which citizens can engage in open, respectful and informed discussion and debate with their peers on a given issue. This rhetoric about citizens assemblies was often highlighted on banners in protest camps or displayed outwards on the edge of territory that was taken by XR activists during actions.

Another banner promoting citizens assemblies by the cenotaph today. No party politics, no short-term election thinking, no hidden money.... just ordinary people selected at random.... learning and deciding together (Field Diary 08.10.19).

Citizen assemblies are often credited with unlocking the debate in the Republic of Ireland about abortion which many traditional politicians had shied away from and led to substantial constitutional change. It is unusual for a social movement to promote a specific process to be adopted by governments and organisations as a mechanism or process to gain broader population acceptance of the urgent change they are campaigning for. Again, citizens' assemblies may be representative, but they are not accountable for decisions or recommendations to an electorate.

The use of citizens' assemblies to decide on actions to address the climate emergency was an early demand of the government as XR began to form in 2018. The practice of citizens' assemblies and the development of the associated concept of peoples' assemblies, was an important part of the activism of XR at a local level. XR in developing the concept, process and practice of peoples' assemblies issued a

²⁵ This process is called sortition.

manual in 2020. (Extinction Rebellion, 2020). The manual identifies three ways in which people's assemblies can be used. Firstly, assemblies could be held in public places to engage others in conversation and build the movement. Secondly, they could form part of direct action practice when taking or holding territory involving and supporting those people in their action. Lastly they were a way that groups at all levels of the movement could come together to make decisions about how to organise themselves. The manual set out a rigid structure to be adopted in organising and facilitating people's assemblies as well as a structured process for planning an assembly.

However, this process and practice of assemblies was engaged with more loosely than this and took forms outside of that described in the manual. Analysis of photos, video clips and data in applications of those activists practising citizen's and people's assemblies demonstrated that they were used for discussion and decision-making but also explicitly as a mechanism of activists practising, discovering and learning about the power and limitations of deliberative democracy at different levels. They were employed to make tactical decisions about when and how to take and end actions.

A citizens' assembly was held this afternoon in the big tent in Marble Arch. It decides that XR will leave and clear up Marble Arch on Thursday. Clearing up is important. There was more discussion about leaving no trace than there was about when we should finish this phase of the rebellion. It's a decision not only about when this phase stops but how it stops and how it is marked (Field Diary 23.04.2019).

Activist smartphone doings identified that at a local level assemblies were certainly about modelling this form of deliberative democracy to explore its possibilities and limitations, but it was also about collective decision making, learning and deciding together, producing solidarities and a deeper commitment to activism and actions. They were a more informal and unstructured practice which departed from the rigid and structured central and strategic rhetoric and expectation. Even when an external observer may have perceived XR Hackney or an affinity group meeting together as no more than talking shops, the sequence of these relations gave meaning to activism in that place and produced relations, connections and possibilities.

XR's tactics are without doubt exclusionary. Being arrested, as well as going to court with the possibility of being imprisoned, is not open to all and is excluding. XR's relationship with the police as well as the messaging of some activists has also been criticised as inappropriately friendly.

There's lots of online conversation about the flowers from XR members sent to the police in Brixton. Whilst this is a lovely human gesture, it's important to be aware of how alienating it is to the many communities who cannot rely on the police to treat them safely and without discrimination. There are so many examples, but this one has a very long and painful history. Both in 1995 and 2008, young black men died while being held in police custody in Brixton station....the families and communities of these men are still around they are hurting about the mistreatment. When they see us sending the police flowers and thank you cards, it reinforces their belief that XR members don't know/care about their oppression at the hands of the police (WhatsApp broadcast message to Arrestee Support members in Field Diary 10.10.2019).

Some organisations feel that XR actions and relationship with the police endangers future collective mobilisations and all of the years of work that they have been undertaking. They argue that the police are part of the problem and should be opposed and challenged. XR by supporting peoples' court cases, risks drawing significant resources, time, money and energy from the environmental movement and from the individuals involved which could otherwise be directed towards people most affected by climate change.

XR members' ability to perceive the police and criminal justice system as benign structures who might even join their "rebellion" smacks of race and class privilege (Cowan, 2019).

XR was set up by white middle-class people and remains a largely white middle class organisation trading on its white privilege. XR is not strongly rooted in working-class organisations and communities. XR recognises that this may inhibit building the broad-based support necessary for a radical transition to sustainability which requires contributions from all strands of environmentalism, especially the working class and black communities. In response XR has set up groups to attract working class activists and privileged more diverse voices as leaders and spokespeople.

However, despite an increasing visibility of these activists at actions and in leadership positions, XR is still largely white and middle class.

XR has an explicit theory of change which is set out in detail in chapter 1 and discussed in the section on environmental movements emergence, development and impact later in this chapter. As mentioned above critics argue that XR misunderstands how change happens with a misreading of the success of the American civil rights movements and Gandhi because these were based on decades of painstaking grassroots organising of those oppressed and then mobilising them against their oppressor.

The American civil rights movement succeeded in its strategy of nonviolent civil disobedience precisely because the very black communities rising up were the victims of the racist segregation and institutionalised brutality which they were protesting. The civil rights movement was therefore inherently grassroots and broad-based, emerging from the institutions of black communities (Ahmed, 2019).

XR's theory of change shapes its activism which leads it to focus most actions in urban centres, particularly London; on making demands of government and with easily understood but potentially unnuanced demands. This results in much of the disruption caused by XR inconveniencing urban populations, and workers at fossil fuel companies and their funders in general rather than directly targeting the powerful whilst engaging the working class and black communities. Ahmed (2019) argues that disruption does not work if that disruption affects those from whom you need support in order to build a mass movement. I discuss why disruption and non-violent direct action is used by radical activism and how and why it does work to achieve change in some situations in a following section on activism repertoire and tactics later in this chapter. Ahmed (2019) also asserts that there is no evidence that mass arrests will lead the British neoliberal state to capitulate and that the focus on government will be ineffective as it is not the locus of power and political decision making.

An unusual feature of XR, as a radical social movement, is that at its launch in October 2018 it was clear about and published its demands of government and

organisations contributing to the climate emergency and biodiversity loss as well as articulating its ten principles and values. The major articulation of its campaigns is around telling the truth about climate change and acting on that truth now. This focuses on the reduction of emissions and limiting global warming to 1.5c whilst the present is already bleak for many who are most likely to be impacted by environmental problems. This clarity and focus of demands, based on highlighting science now, obscures other insights such as those that can be gained from historical struggles of indigenous people to protect their lands and environment. Focus on science potentially privileges technical solutions to the climate emergency, whilst a focus on indigenous knowledges and their link to nature may encourage searching for solutions elsewhere and foreground voices seeking to articulate the role of extractivism in causing the climate emergency. Some of this appeal to *the science* is balanced by XR's focus on climate justice, with many local groups thinking about how they may work towards decolonising XR and adopting a fourth demand of the government about this issue. Hackney XR, for example, in January 2020 at one of its regular Monday meetings considered

what would the climate crisis look like and what would our response and demands be if we talked about including everyone globally and not just our own particular nation or culture? and considered the implications for XR of not looking towards scientists but rather the experiences of indigenous communities who have had actual experiences of the consequences of climate change over generations (Field Diary 12.01.2020).

These considerations led to the adoption of a fourth demand focused on the need for a just transition which is in Figure 9.



Figure 9: XR Hackney's fourth demand (Hackney, 2020)

This demands that the government respond to the climate and ecological emergency with a just transition which means moving to a world that prioritises the needs of those disproportionately harmed by systemic racial and social injustice.

The fluid, messy and overlapping boundaries of environmentalisms

It has never been easy for UK environmentalisms, environmental movements and individual activists to define precisely what they are or what they do because they have fluid, messy and overlapping boundaries. The history of UK environmentalisms demonstrates the many ways in which people choose to be active and involved from loose networks to membership of national or international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). However, the same activist

who engages in clandestine direct action might well also take part in mass demonstrations, subscribe to a number of e-mail lists and participate in a local transition initiative (North, 2010, p. 1595).

Although environmental issues are clearly the key focus of local environmental activist groups there is a UK tradition in activism of linked concerns and campaigning on a wider range of issues. Doherty et al. (2007) identify a very wide range of new social movement issues that can be traced as linked or entangled with environmentalism. These include feminism, gay and lesbian rights, anti-racism, asylum and immigration, state surveillance, nuclear weapons, opposition to wars, military recruitment and the arms trade, rights of minority groups and animal rights. These linkages are important to understanding environmental activist groups and the extent to which activists can mobilise those interested and motivated to take action on specific topics. The wide range of workshops held at the Earth First! summer gathering in 2018 demonstrates this interconnected interest within one radical network. The workshop topics included animal rights, nuclear power, nuclear weapons, migrant solidarity, fracking, biochar, guerrilla gardening, new roads, class and coal fired power stations (Earth First!, 2018).

There is a history in both the reformist and radical dimensions of environmental activism of organisations or networks focusing on a broad range of environmental topics and on single issues. In addition, activists are often involved with different

organisations and different topics and committed activists from previous protest topics can be the fertile ground for new areas of activism (Saunders, 2013). Saunders (2013) describes, for example, how the twelve founding members of Earth First! came from *latent* green, peace or animal rights networks as well as the *protest repertoire* of the anti-roads movement emerging in the direct action on climate change and anti-aviation. Plows (2008) argues that radical climate activists should not be understood as only interested in a single issue, but as having emerged with a heritage. That heritage being the alter-globalisation and before that the UK's anti-roads and reclaim the streets movements. However, radical activist groups have increasingly linked their issues of concern to environmental issues and the environmental movement. For example, Occupy which emerged in the UK in 2011 linked inequality to the environmental crisis (Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012, p. 285).

the present corporate system fits the definition of a psychopath, driving the rapid destruction of our society and the natural environment (Occupy London, 2011)

While campaign groups such as Campaign against Climate Chaos and the Stop Climate Chaos coalition mobilised by arranging large marches of people to lobby governments to take fair, binding and ambitious steps towards stopping climate change, radical activists are committed to taking direct action with 'an underlying orientation towards anarchist, anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian perspectives' (Russell, 2014, p. 223). There are problematic messy and fluid boundaries between radical activists, reformist environmentalists and the public more generally. For example, it is often the coalescence of the opinions and interests of the broader public, local interest groups and direct action activists around single issues such as road building that magnifies protest (Doherty, 1999). There are some studies of protests against specific road building schemes which give insight into what was driving the protests. Peter North, in his detailed study of the Solsbury Hill road scheme, highlights the way that eco activists and the local community had uneasy alliances for a common cause (North, 1998). Research into the nature and context of the activism against the last major road building programme in Britain identified that it took approaching a decade for a road protest movement to gain momentum, but

when the boundaries became blurred alliances developed and they started to have impact (Doherty et al., 2000).

As identified in chapter 1, XR is a 'curated' non-hierarchical organisation based on affinity groups, local networks, regional groupings and special interest groups. It is curated in the sense that there is some oversight and direction from central groupings and nationally developed training packages and resources and planning and coordination of major actions. XR doesn't have a conventional membership offer or hierarchical management and leadership structure. Nor is it, like other radical groups such as EFi, simply a convenient banner for people of similar philosophies to work under. It has developed an organisational structure purposefully, that seeks to promote organisational solidarity whilst empowering XR activists to take action. In order to be part of the XR movement all you need to do is sign up to XR's demands, principles and values and then you can act on XR's behalf. XR has ten principles and values. They include avoiding blaming and shaming, creating a movement with a regenerative culture, being welcoming, and reflecting and learning. Another benefit of this organisational design is that so far it has avoided the threat of sequestration of assets through legal action which constrains the actions of many NGO's.

as Greenpeace scored campaign successes through the 1980's and 1990's it became wealthier and able to afford more equipment, employees, boats and property. This made it acceptable in a way that it would not previously have been to novel legal manoeuvres introduced by the UK authorities that allowed the sequestration of the assets of groups (Yearly, 2005 p. 16).

Facilitating the development of special interest groups, such as Christian Climate Action, Writers Rebel or XR Scientists as a key part of the organisational structure, allows different topics of activism to shine a spotlight on the climate emergency and biodiversity loss from their perspective. This unique organisational design has had its difficulties, but it has facilitated a high-profile movement which grew quickly and has attracted large numbers of new and *recycled* activists and has had impact. In addition, XR activists have followed the tradition of being engaged in a range of actions on related issues with activists' involvement in actions organised by Animal Rebellion, Insulate Britain, StopHS2 or Just Stop Oil.

Environmental movements emergence, development and impact (cycle of movements)

Some radical manifestations of activism, such as Occupy, EF! or Camps for Climate Action gather momentum, mobilise and gain visibility, but within a few years the focus of activism shifts. Tarrow proposed a theory of protest cycles or ‘cycles of contention’ (Tarrow, 2011, p. 7) to help to explain how activism in social movements appears to wax and wane both generally and in relation to different topics and different places. This is illustrated in Figure 10.

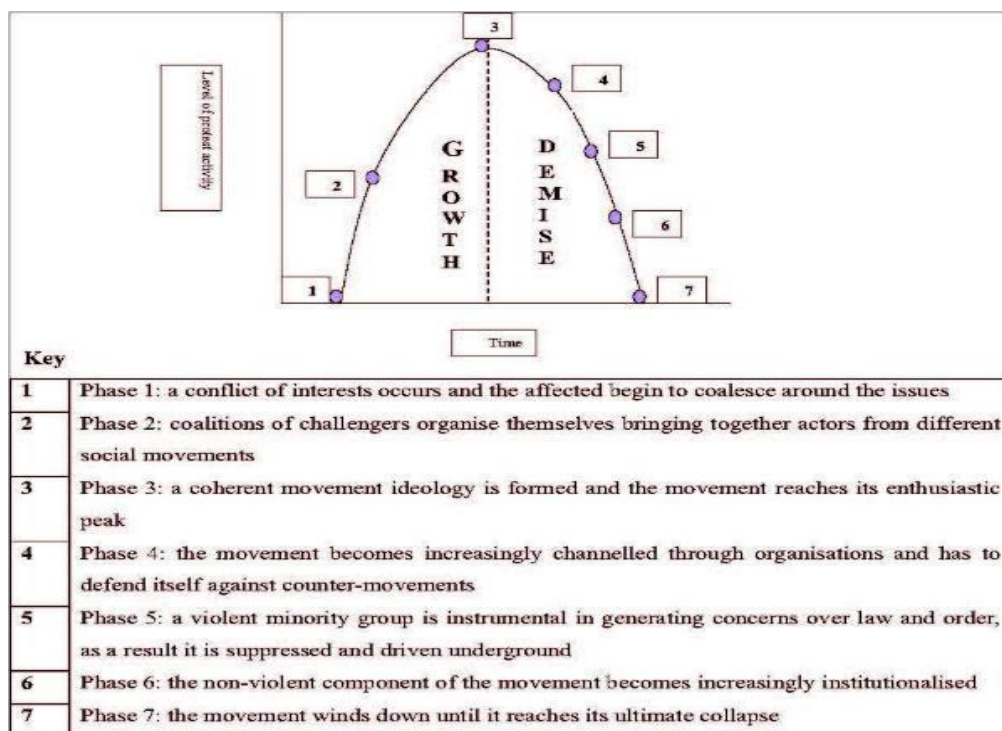


Figure 10: Tarrow's protest cycles (Saunders, 2013, p. 125).

Swyngedouw has argued that protest and environmentalism has waned because we live in an era of *post politics* (Swyngedouw, 2010). Castree sums up this assertion as

a period where political and economic elites in the West have successfully reduced the challenges to their agendas without taking an overtly authoritarian turn (Castree, 2014, p. 467).

The activism of XR during 2019, as with the Occupy movement before it, questions whether the concept of *post-politics* is useful in the analysis of contemporary environmentalisms, perhaps mistaking the periodic waxing and waning of activism

for sea changes. Climate change activism in the UK has gone through periods of intensity as well as lulls. In the early noughties, climate change activism was more intense with Camps for Climate Action attracting thousands willing to engage in direct action against sites which contributed to the climate emergency. By the end of the decade this focus dissipated.

Doherty et al (2007) claimed to have undertaken and published the first systematic analysis of the protest activity of environmental direct-action groups. This challenged some aspects of new social movement theory. Firstly, explanations related to resource mobilisation theory and political opportunity theory, in that Doherty et al (2007) found no concerted attempt to influence government policy. The activists' aim rather was to develop a resistance culture, disrupt norms and show that alternatives were possible. When activists were affecting public debate, their actions were sustained and revitalised. It was this, rather than political opportunities, that spurred their actions. My research has identified that XR is a different type of radical environmental group, which unlike EF! articulates its demands as a direct challenge to the government to change its policy, as well as seeking to disrupt and resist with its actions being sustained and revitalised because it captures public attention and influences public discourse. Secondly, Doherty et al (2007) findings challenge the cycle of protest proposed by Tarrow concerning the reasons that lead to the eventual reduction of activism. Although Tarrow recognises that the cause of the demise varies he does not envisage that it is the exhaustion, personal tensions and material costs of sustained activism that leads to this decline. For movements that are sustained by getting their activism noticed and affecting the public debate, how what they do is reported in the media is critical. Rootes identifies how the news value, as judged by journalists, declines unless the protest changes, develops, becomes more innovative or intense.

Journalists themselves testify to the declining news value of routine protest towards the end of this period. According to Paul Brown, the *Guardian's* environmental correspondent, by 1992-1993 there was enormous fatigue about protest on the part of the news desk. Whereas previously the experience of simply being on a Greenpeace boat was something a journalist could write about, by 1992-1993 such a report would only be considered newsworthy if there was a high element of danger (Rootes, 2000, p. 39).

From its inception XR recognised the important role of branding, media management and the use of social media to both organise and promote its objectives. Although a sophisticated approach to media management may be noticeable in large reformist environmental organisations this is unique in relation to radical activist movements. XR developed a sophisticated fifty page design guide to allow diverse decentralised actions to take place whilst at the same time as being understood as a single movement. There are four fundamental building blocks that help people visually recognise and understand XR: The first is the Extinction Symbol. This symbol is a circle around an hourglass. It was created in 2011 by street artist ESP and is loaned to XR as long as it was not used for any commercial purposes. The circle represents the planet earth and the stylised hourglass is a warning that time is running out for action on climate change. The second is an XR Logotype which combined with the extinction symbol make up the XR logo. The third is a colour palette. The two main colours are green and black with ten other bright colours from 'Angry' to 'Warm Yellow'. Specific colours are used with wood block symbols to promote particular messages or ideas. For example, warm yellow with a bee inside a hexagon to promote Citizens Assemblies. Lastly, fonts. The headline font, FUCXED CAPS, is a bespoke font created for XR and used for large headings, with text using either italic or regular Crimson. Combined, these act as XR's *calling cards* to ensure messages are visible and understood as a single movement. Social media is used extensively to develop interaction and debate between activists, coordinate and intensify actions as well as to promote XR's actions and activities to the wider public and opinion formers. The importance, significance, complexity and uniqueness of this use of social media is explored in subsequent chapters.

Tarrow's cycle of protest and analysis doesn't account for chance events which lead to movements thriving or withering. In the current environment, we would probably add chance or fate as an important factor given the impact of Covid 19 on protest. The Covid 19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on activism in general and XR activism in particular, since it led to national and international lockdowns from March 2020. The extent that this is a lull in activism or indicates a step change in the intensity or direction of activism only time will tell. XR recognises the role played by both exhaustion and personal tensions in the decline of social movements identified by Doherty et al (2007). It has therefore built into its principles and values the

support for a regenerative culture that is 'healthy, resilient and adaptable' as well as avoiding 'blaming and shaming' with organisational mechanisms to resolve disputes and learn from mistakes. (Extinction Rebellion, 2021).

On 31 October 2018 XR declared a rebellion as a result of a climate emergency. XR had begun to emerge into public space in May 2018, initially formed by activists who were part of Rising Up!, who have close links to Occupy, Earth First! and other environmental social movements. XR began to lay down a challenge to the state. It also laid down a challenge to other environmental activists, movements and organisations to become more radical and urgent in their demands and tactics which was symbolised in mid-October 2018 by its occupation of the UK headquarters of Greenpeace. Many environmentalisms emerge and develop organically, often around a small group of early leaders. As they grow, they develop organisationally, or as a network, and begin to express their purpose, values and objectives. Unusually the strategy and tactics of XR were purposely developed around a very specific theory of how change happens that was promoted by one of XR's founder members Roger Hallam and is outlined in chapter 1. This theory of change or *the civil resistance model* was overt and published from the outset and has six elements. Firstly, a need for significant numbers of activists to act and get involved; perhaps fifty thousand people or 3.5% of the population. This 3.5% rule was adopted as a result of reading the research of Erica Chenoweth (2017). Secondly, the focus of action needs to be on the government and elites in the capital city; Thirdly, you need to take Direct Action, break the law and get noticed; Fourthly, the activists need to be non-violent. Fifthly, organised actions need to be sustained day after day and lastly these actions need to be fun and uplifting (Hallam, 2019). Although, as mentioned previously, this theory has been criticised as based on a flawed or misunderstood social science academic literature (Ahmed, 2019; Berglund and Schmidt, 2020) it continues to be developed in the light of experience and still substantially underpins XR's strategy and tactics. Although some activists analyse and articulate how they believe change happens and base their strategy and tactics upon it, it is unusual that this is based upon a detailed review of the academic literature.

It is noteworthy that XR have a theory of change at all, as social movement since the end of the Cold War have largely shunned such overall prescriptive

models of how to achieve positive social change (Berglund and Schmidt, 2020, p. 7).

So, whatever the validity of this theory of change, XR sought to understand how change happens and this theory of change has shaped most aspects of its strategy, tactics and organisation.

There is no doubt that XR is part of a UK tradition of radical environmental movements with a key tactic being non-violent direct action. XR is a non-hierarchical organisation but more than just a loose network of direct action activists, despite being built up on the basis of affinity groups and has managed to mobilise thousands of activists since it was launched in October 2018. It took XR about six months to develop a level of mobilisation that anti roadbuilding activists took approaching a decade to achieve.

In 2019, climate change went from being an issue that many people were concerned about to one which many are alarmed by and demand swifter government action on (Berglund and Schmidt, 2020, p. 1).

What is unusual about XR is how quickly it built an extensive activist base, arranged large actions over many days and had significant impact. Whilst the road building protests of the 1990's took a decade to mobilise thousands to take direct action XR achieved this in under six months. XR appeared to come out of nowhere and had the ability to reach across and have impact in the way that mass trespass and climate camps did not. My research identifies that this was in part because XR was built on the long history of UK environmental activisms, it exploited existing networks such as Rising Up! and as a push/pull response to members of older movements who had become less radical and institutionalised. XR activists often mentioned they were once, or continued to be, members of environmental organisations such as FOE and Greenpeace and joined XR to become more active and be part of an organisation that was *going to get stuff done*.

I listened to speeches in Parliament Square this afternoon.... Gail Bradbrook²⁶ spoke about XR's launch from the same spot in October last year

²⁶ Gail Bradbrook in introducing the film 'Tales of resistance: The battle of Newbury Bypass' on YouTube, paid tribute to previous UK environmentalisms "XR stands on the shoulders of what has gone before" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNjyTA3xaek>

and how we had all built a mass movement since then. She said that we needed to be grateful for all the other rebels who trod the path we were following. “XR stands on the shoulders of what has gone before...we are the ‘movement of movements’”. The movement of movements reminds me of previous radical anti-capitalist protests (Field Diary 17.04.2019).

The core membership of Rising up! was only about thirty people with about two thousand more registered on their website. However, the vision, values, aims, objectives, structure and even action design that were largely adopted by XR were all conceived and trialled by RisingUp! which allowed XR to emerge and then grow quickly.

The origins of XR stretch back through several years of failed campaigns and a few which seemed to work, including the anti-road roads protest and Plain Stupid. In 2016 two veteran activists Gail Bradbrook and Roger Hallam, were separately exploring some similar ideas about civil disobedience and social change. They made contact online and agreed to meet up with a few others. They agreed to set up a network called Rising up! to seed and support environmental and social campaigns (Melia, 2021, p. 167).

I explore the debt that XR owes to previous activist repertoires and tactics in the next section and a concept of eldership in more detail in chapter five.

Activisms repertoire and tactics

Activism, including environmental activism, has over the years developed a repertoire of tactics to promote its cause and get noticed. From protest camps to rebel clowning, swarming²⁷ to naked protest. I examine the tactics and repertoires that XR have adopted and developed in the chapters that follow. Here I examine how and why XR uses non-violent direct action as a key tactic. Civil disobedience has a very long history in the UK as well as internationally, to try to bring about change and struggle for a better world. From the suffragettes demanding votes for women, Ghandi striving for Indian independence, Martin Luther King Jr. seeking civil rights in the United States or the British anti roads protests in the 1990’s to stop the

²⁷ The tactic of “swarming” involves blocking roads for about ten minutes at a time and then moving on. A tactic that is disruptive but mostly avoids arrest.

destruction of landscapes and rare flora and fauna. All successfully used non-violent direct action (NVDA) as a key tactic of their movements.

Civil disobedience gets attention from the general public, the media and the state. Disruption challenges people and encourages them to take a side, engage in the discussion, or make a choice about climate change rather than ignoring it as a *too troublesome* issue to address in their lives. It forces people and the state to take a position, disrupts people's thought processes and invites them to enquire about the activists' motivation. Breaking the law can be one of the most powerful ways to get peoples' and the state's attention. It agitates, disrupts and demands engagement and attention. As well as traditional protest marches and peaceful demonstrations XR also uses civil disobedience and the tactic of NVDA which breaks the law and often leads to arrest by the police as a response to the urgency of action required by the climate emergency. Essentially XR uses this tactic because, like these other social movements, XR thinks it will work, but also because collective action builds solidarity with others and makes activists feel that they are making a personal contribution, and importantly a sacrifice, commensurate with their level of concern about climate change. XR realises that disruption will upset some but believes many more will listen to what they have to say. Sometimes they have got this balance wrong, like the well-publicised disruption to the East London light railway and the tube at Canning Town, mentioned previously, that led to activists being dragged from the roof of trains with all of the media attention focused on that disruption and the anger of commuters and not the issue of the climate emergency.

Despite such instances, XR has adopted NVDA as a central tactic as well as adopting and adapting this activist repertoire. It has developed a range of training to promote 'inspirational, hard hitting and visionary NVDA' (Extinction Rebellion, 2020). What is unusual about XR is the extent it has used this repertoire and the number of creative actions it has managed to deploy over the course of its first years on the streets. Whilst these are described and examined in more detail in the following chapters it is worth briefly highlighting that XR's urban street protests are creative, grab attention and are disrupting. Sometimes a significant number of activists (who self-designate themselves as arrestables) take illegal actions or just lie down and refuse to move and are then arrested by the police. For example, in the first week of

the April 2019 rebellion in London 1,065 activists were arrested by police in waves, often being carried as they peacefully lay down to make arrest more difficult. So many activists were arrested that often the police had to pause due to limitations on their capacity to transport activists to police stations and then hold and process them there. Only a few campaigns have followed the strategy of openly courting arrest to bring an issue to public attention (Doherty, 2002).

The most unusual aspect of the protests was the willingness of the protestors to be arrested. That is, arrests were not just an inevitable result of disruption, but an end in itself (Berglund and Schmidt, 2020, p. 2).

So why does XR use non-violent direct action? Firstly, XR argues that they are using civil disobedience as a last resort having tried other means to struggle for change over many years. Writing letters, lobbying Members of Parliament or occasional point to point marches have not worked or achieved the response required. XR argues that action is now urgent if we are to avoid disaster, and the actions need to be commensurate with the scale of the climate emergency. Secondly, XR accepts that breaking the law will have consequences for individuals. Activists take personal responsibility. They do not hide their faces, they do not run away from the police, but are arrested and argue their cases in the courts and accept the consequences. They are universally and always non-violent and open and sincere in their purpose and objectives. Thirdly, their actions are not just to protect themselves but to protect the people who are most vulnerable to climate change. Highlighting countries and islands that are vulnerable to sea level rises, or countries and people unable to protect themselves or cope with extreme weather events.

Conclusion

My research has identified that there are eight key features of XR's activism that help to define and explain its position in contemporary UK environmental activism and how it relates to histories of environmentalisms. They explain the similarity to, and difference from, other environmentalisms. This chapter does not seek to argue that XR is new or even a new social movement, but that understanding XR in the context of the history of British environmentalisms and understanding its characteristics makes visible what makes it interesting or unusual. It gives a context to why XR

matters which is addressed throughout the remainder of this thesis. These themes are developed and explored more fully in the subsequent chapters. As I have identified, social movements have been analysed in a number of ways to understand their emergence, development, growth and decline. Scholars may stress the opportunity for growth or the cycle of contention but although social movement theory helps in understanding the emergence of XR my research has identified that lucky accidents or '*Patterns of Serendipity*' also played a key part in XR's emergence, growth and impact. Whether that was the fine weather in London during the first Rebellion, significant early financial donations, the response of the police, or the support and action of other environmentalists and environmental organisations it is clear that this *pattern of serendipity* has played an important role.

XR has developed a common identity for its activists not just through its vision and values, but with its three demands and clear and identifiable branding almost universally adopted by activists during actions. XR is a non-hierarchical organisation, based on a SOS²⁸ which makes extensive use of social media, developed network ties and targeted public protest and extended rebellions over many days to challenge governments inadequate response to a climate emergency. XR, in being alive to the potential power of social movements, has focused on storytelling both about individual activists and XR's journey to take action as a mechanism to produce solidarity at different organisational levels.

Examining the contemporary criticisms of local XR activisms in the context of criticisms of historical environmental activisms, there are patterns of these concerns that re-emerge and in addition many of these criticisms do not recognise that XR is just one part of an extensive range of environmentalisms. As Steve Melia points out:

Campaigning success attracts many people with different agendas. Some of which may be entirely justified but are not achievable by one social movement (Melia, 2021 p. 210).

What is interesting about the criticisms is that they come from very different quarters and they highlight a number of findings. Firstly, that XR has attracted criticisms

²⁸ As identified in Chapter 1 the self-organising system adopted by XR distributes authority to circles (teams) which have the mandate to take action without asking permission. It seeks to promote the ideas of holacracy which focuses on defining roles and decentralising decision making.

because it has been high profile and successful. Secondly, that XR is one part of environmentalism and not a home for all environmental activists. Thirdly, that simple messaging in a complex world can be effective but invites criticism for being naive or simplistic. Fourthly, there are tensions between single topic campaigns and broader social movements. Lastly there is a tension between movements that focus on objectives and action and those that seek to understand and demand deeper analysis and exploration of underlying causes of those problems. XR initially focused most of its energies on the former with its campaign on the topics of the climate emergency and biodiversity loss and on specific objectives and taking action. These issues of XR's language and framing are examined in more detail in chapter 7.

This research demonstrates that contemporary and XR activism cannot be properly understood unless seen in the context of the history of UK environmentalism. It is only in this context that it becomes clear what is an adaptation or development of that tradition of environmentalism and what is new, different and novel. XR has blended and adapted learning from previous environmental and radical social movements with developing new activism. XR is a radical environmental movement that has built on the learning and characteristics of radical environmental movements that have gone before, but with a unique organisational structure, demands of government, speed of mobilisation and sophistication of creative actions and communication.

Chapter 4

Place

Met B1 at the Oxford Street barricade of Marble Arch. She is wearing her pink high vis jacket with 'We are all Fucked' on the back. As we stood talking, the police constantly passed by carrying pizza boxes.... S2 has arranged for us to meet Diane Abbott at Parliament Square tomorrow morning. Lots of rumours about police clearing the roads about Marble Arch soon.... They are holding citizens assemblies at the stage. There are voices to clear Marble Arch and leave it cleaner than before, some for escalation, some for occupations, some to target the London financial centres, some to spread around the country. Trade union groups and anti-racist groups are handing out leaflets outside the tube station.... B4 talked about emotional and physical exertion 'we just need to rest' (Field Diary 22.04.2019).



Figure 11: Banner at Marble Arch London (Source author).

This chapter examines the importance of place in XR contemporary environmental activism. There is a broad range of literature, across social science disciplines, that examine environmental activism, protest and place (Routledge, 1992; Cresswell, 1994; Pickerill, 2003; Doherty et al., 2007; Leitner et al., 2008; Markwell and Waitt, 2009; North, 2010; Halvorsen, 2017) which identifies the importance of the place/activism entanglement. However, this work largely prioritises the examination of the place/activism entanglement with either narrow aspects of the concept of place, such as location, site or social media, does not differentiate adequately between place and space, or engages in multiple spatialities rather than focusing on examining and researching the complexity of the gathering, weaving or assemblages of materialities, meanings and practices *in* just one place (Cresswell, 2014). Even

when the concept of place is interrogated in the analysis of activism, it is often in order to reveal why 'movements emerge [...] also why they emerge where they do' (Routledge, 1992 p. 591) rather than how place may shape the impact that environmental movements have in achieving change or what place does. This chapter examines the development of the concept of place and argues that by fully engaging this slippery concept, its entanglement with environmental activism and its complexity, a fuller and deeper understanding of this activism, including what actions are impactful, is obtained. This research and its examination of place focuses on London for four reasons. Firstly, XR's major and sustained actions were in London because it is the capital city, with major potential protest targets, and as the place of national government. Secondly, because the affinity group and local XR group to which I belonged were located in London. Thirdly, it is a place with a history and memories of a place of protest which helps to contextualise XR's actions. Lastly, because I have strong personal attachments to, and memories of, London over many years including as a place of activism and protest.

In this chapter I identify eight aspects of place that are intertwined with XR's activisms, the complexity of the concept of place, and how that complexity enriches our understanding of these contemporary environmental activisms. Firstly, I examine how meaning is created from and at a place of protest, then the role of protest camps in these activisms. Thirdly how XR uses places as territory and what this does. Fourthly, the place of performance, art and music in XR's activism and action design. Fifthly, how place is used as a spatial strategy. Sixthly, how memories are intertwined with these activisms and place. Seventhly how these XR activisms use the sense of being *in* place or *out* of place to produce more powerful activism and lastly how social media and smartphones now need to be understood as integral and intertwined with place to analyse the activism/social media entanglement. The chapter gives details about how the main actions in London in 2019 and 2020 (outlined in chapter 1) developed and is written purposefully with *Thick Description* and fine details of observations as a contribution to understanding the world better by aiming to be 'descriptively rich' and 'findings driven' (Besbris and Khan, 2017, p. 152).

A personal story

I know Trafalgar Square well. I can remember my nan taking me there when I was a child. I've been on demos marching to Trafalgar Square. Heard speeches there. Seen anger, joyfulness, love and frustration within its boundaries. I've been in its fountains on New Year's Eve. I've seen it quiet and cleared of traffic. Sometimes half marathon runners are the only people on streets so all you hear are cheers and the sounds of their efforts. Sometimes it's the noise, bustle and busyness that you notice, rather than the statues around the square, the column, or even Nelson on his perch. Sometimes it seems as if everybody is in a hurry to go somewhere else...apart from the tourists of course. It's a place for street performers and a place to put a Norwegian spruce in December. My first memories of Trafalgar Square are my first memories of London. My nan took me to Lyons coffee house opposite Charing Cross railway station. She said she had first been there when she was a child and she had been born in 1907! We then went to Trafalgar Square to feed the pigeons. She bought me and my brother a small bag of seeds each. Pigeons were everywhere, flocking from person to person. On arms, heads and hands. When I was talking to B1 as she was locked on under a trailer in the road in front of Nelson's column in the October 2019 Rebellion, I thought how strange it was that there was now not a pigeon in sight! When the Territorial Support group of the Metropolitan police stormed the square two days later, ripping up tents and pushing rebels to the floor, they weren't their streets, they were our streets. My street. My place. I have a sense of it as a place and that some part of it belongs to me and my memories. Other Rebels had different memories, but it was their place too.

The significance of the entanglements of place and environmental activism

It is almost thirty years since Routledge highlighted that social movement research paid 'insufficient attention to how movement character and agency are mediated by place' (1992, p. 588). Since then scholars have developed the concept of place, and identified and explored how it is different to space (Massey, 1994; Anderson, 2015; Cresswell, 2015). Activism is often best understood in specific places, despite many environmental concerns being global (Doherty et al., 2007). Place is a 'way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world' and is 'as much about epistemology as it is about ontology' (Creswell, 2015 p. 18).

Routledge argues that 'The identification with particular places can be of strategic importance for the mobilisation strategies of movements' (2017, p. 7) and encourages us to see protest through the lens of at least nine *sites* or *points of intervention* at which activism is expressed and that these are directly related to the activists 'concerns, goals or broader strategies' (2017, p. 18). These are sites of production, destruction, decision or governance, social reproduction that provide physical and emotional sustenance, circulation such as roads or airports, consumption, potential to stimulate imagined futures, assumptions which attempt to change how people think and collaboration with existing hegemony. However, the physical locations of protest 'are not always stationary' (Creswell, 2015, p. 13) and the entanglement of activism with place is more complex than the privileging of physical sites or locations.

Harvey argues that place is a 'social construct' (1996, p. 261). Sack (2001) considers place as social, but also cultural and natural, in that it is a concept that allows us to weave together strands of location, nature, social relations, meaning, identity and memories without reducing one to another. Agnew (1987) understood place as a meaningful location comprising the dimensions of *location*, *locale* and *sense of place*. Location being the arrangement of settings relative to broader scales of political-economic process. Locale the setting for social action and interaction and the sense of place the attachments and meanings associated with locale. Creswell describes this as 'the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place' (2015, p. 14). Malpas (2013) draws out an important distinction between place and the associated concept of space. He identifies space as homogenous, regular, uniform, open and expansive. In contrast, a place is heterogenous and bounded, a locus for meaning, memory and identity, that has content and character (Malpas, 2013). Place contains difference and is different from other places and as a result can only be understood in relation to other places (Malpas, 2013) or as Massey puts it, 'place is in part constructed out of the positive interrelations with elsewhere' (1994 p. 169). Massey asserted that the identities of place were always unfixed, contested, open, provisional and multiple. Anderson identifies why space and place are different and are not interchangeable descriptors with place being the counterpoint to space; 'Places are politicised and cultured; they are humanised versions of space' (2015, p. 51). Despite its complexity as a concept, and its contested definition, place helps us

better see, know, and understand the world (Creswell, 2015). Space and place are different concepts and interpretations of spatiality and although contested, when used for analysis can lead to different understandings.

Another aspect of the concept of place which is important to activism is *placemaking* which identifies the continued human attempts to satisfy needs by changing and shaping the nature of a place. This process is both moral and political, with places being transformed by people for particular ends (Sack, 2001). Sack also argues that it is good to create places that increase our capacity to see reality more clearly and increase the variety and complexity of that reality. As Anderson points out:

in taking and making place, different cultural groups generate an array of traces that have the effect, intentionally or otherwise, of arranging, shaping, and transforming places in line with their belief systems and political values (2015, p. 6).

Anderson explains that traces are the ‘marks, residues, or remnants left in a place by cultural life’ (2015, p. 6). Pickerill (2016) pulls together the dimensions of how place can be differently understood with examples of those understandings (Table 4).

| Place is understood as | Examples of how it is understood |
|--------------------------------|---|
| ... | |
| Location and landscape | A climatic region A point on a map A landscape A scale, a local place A territory |
| Feelings and emotions | Love or fear of a place Sense of place Through memories |
| Processes and practices | A political process A moral process Experienced through everyday practices |
| Perceptions and visions | A nostalgic vision of the past A utopic vision of the future Through representations |
| Relations and context | As interconnected Only in relation to wider social processes Through material, social and discursive relations As bounded within regions |

Table 4: How place can be differently understood (Pickerill, 2016, 93).

It is these broad dimensions of the understanding of place that are the starting point for exploring the complexity of this important concept and its entanglement with XR's activism in this chapter.

This complex understanding of place has been explored in relatively limited ways in relation to activism. However, some studies signpost the importance of the place/activism entanglement. Doherty et al. (2007) undertook a protest event analysis of radical environmental activism in Manchester, Oxford and North Wales during the 1990's. This study identified the cyclical nature of activity, the significance of key local actors and the importance of place to the nature, focus and intensity of activism. Place and activism create and define each other, with place acquiring meaning through activism and place shaping 'the very identities of local activists and organisations to which they belong' (Rootes, 2007, p. 728). The concept of place draws our attention to the complicated relations, and interrelations, between local, national and international contention in environmental activism. Although place is important in activism generally, impact may critically depend on the places chosen by activists; 'Perhaps the primary lesson to be learnt from the Non-Stop Picket's longevity and success was: *choose your location carefully*' (Brown and Yaffe, 2018, p. 216). It appears that place may be more significant in environmental activism than with other activist topics. North identifies that 'unlike peace, antiglobalisation or anti-war activism, the range of spaces and scales at which climate change activists organise is greater' (North, 2010, p. 1595). Particularly political spaces and scales.

A range of studies of activism and spatiality, such as Occupy (Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012; Halvorsen, 2015), Gay pride (Markwell and Waitt, 2009) or Greenham common (Cresswell, 1994) provide a range of synergistic studies on which to build this research on XR and understand its entanglement with place. However, in engaging the place/activism entanglement they have privileged aspects of the concept of place and not engaged its complexity. Whilst researching individual elements of the place/activism entanglement broadens our understanding, unless the full complexity and interdependency is examined, important aspects of this entanglement are not fully understood.

Creating meaning from a place of protest

The first aspect of place that is intertwined with activism highlighting the complexity of the concept of place, is how meaning is created from, and within, a place of protest.

...radical environmentalists clearly demonstrate the co-ingredients of people and place in both their perception and their practise.....Place for these individuals is thus insinuated into their configuration of self, particular places are considered an extension, or indeed co-ingredient of their identity. Overtime these places become integrated into activists personalised worlds of meaning (Anderson, 2004, p. 256).

The research identified that XR activists carefully chose places of protest, to create meaning from that place, and to associate and enhance that meaning in its activism, as well as changing 'the emotional resonance of certain places and political messages' (Brown and Pickerill, 2009, p. 28). In choosing places and creating meaning in and from these places XR rallies against government inaction on addressing the climate emergency rather than supporting and celebrating it. XR through its actions shapes places and 'celebrates dissent' in those places (Anderson, 2015 p. 11).

Arrived at London fields at nine. Helped get all the stuff from the cars and prepared the training tent and posters as nobody else had arrived. We chose the centre of the park at the crossroads where everybody would walk past, even the people going to the lido. Bumped into S4 in his police liaison outfit, who helped me put up the pictures around the park trees of indigenous people affected by flooding due to the climate emergency, one in shoulder high water. S4 said swimmers going to the lido would see pictures of people who hadn't meant to get wet and he wondered what they'd make of it..... The 'lung' dance started. Every one of the rebels has got a bee on a stick, is holding a papier mache animal skeleton or an animal flag. The sun is shining and we're signalling extinction! (Field Diary 13.07.2019).

XR began to emerge into public space in May 2018, initially formed by activists who were part of Rising Up!, who have close links to Occupy, Earth First! and other environmental social movements. XR lays down a challenge to the state to transform its articulation of, and response to, the climate emergency. It also lays down a challenge to other environmental activists, movements, and organisations, to

become more radical and urgent in their demands and tactics. In mid-October 2018 XR's activists occupied the UK headquarters of Greenpeace to protest at their inadequate response to the climate emergency.

London is a major centre of international finance, the headquarters of fossil fuel corporations and the UK government as well as an established place of protest. XR's declaration of rebellion took place in Parliament Square opposite the Palace of Westminster, in front of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, and less than two hundred metres from Downing Street. This place is closest to all three arms of government in the UK. It is a place steeped in history and is usually busy with a smorgasbord of traffic, protest, politics, and tourists. XR made three demands of the UK government. To *tell the truth* about the climate and ecological emergency, to *act now* to halt biodiversity loss and reduce CO₂ emissions to net zero by 2025 and *move beyond politics* with the establishment of a citizen's assembly to lead decisions about climate and ecological justice (Knights, 2019).

In November 2018 XR continued its civil disobedience which was focused on central London. Rebels glued their hands to doors in the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the gates of Downing Street and Buckingham Palace. They blocked five of the main road bridges over the River Thames causing significant disruption for a day and leading to over seventy arrests. Towards the end of the month rebels began using the tactic of swarming by blocking roads for about ten minutes at a time and then moving on. On 15 April 2019, with a significant escalation in the intensity of action, XR declared an international rebellion and occupied the five iconic locations in central London of Marble Arch, Oxford Circus, Waterloo Bridge, Parliament Square and Piccadilly Circus. Adjacent roads were blocked, and these places were *taken* and *controlled* by the activists, which changed the day-to-day use and activities of those places. Each place was renamed and ascribed specific meaning by XR, linked to the movement's demands and identified as sites for activists from different regions of the UK. This re-nominalism was an important way in which XR created meaning in a place.

Marble Arch was ascribed *This is an emergency* and allocated to London activists. Oxford Circus became *Tell the truth* and was blockaded by activists from Wales and

Bristol. Waterloo Bridge was blocked by a flat backed lorry with *Act now* painted in large letters on the front and was identified for activists from the southwest of England. The lorry also acted as a stage for speeches and music. This bridge over the Thames, from which there is a clear view of St Paul's Cathedral and the City of London skyline, became a *garden bridge* with trees in large soil filled bags populating the central road division. Waves of arrests of the rebels by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) were greeted by singing and clapping. Parliament Square became a place to demand a move to *Beyond politics* for activists from North England, The Midlands and East Anglia. From a podium in the middle of Parliament Square political speeches, including from one of the founding members of XR, Gail Bradbrook, exhorted the need for a new form of politics that could facilitate the implementation of fundamental changes to the UK's economic and social system. Responding rebels chanted *system change not climate change*. XR Youth marched from Hyde Park and *took* Piccadilly Circus which initially became *The heart* for youth activists.

Get to Parliament Square about 11:30. It's raining for the first time and then heavily. I walk across Parliament Square. There's tape and police everywhere, stopping people crossing to the Palace of Westminster side of the pavement. I talked to Steve Bray, who says he's no longer standing in the European elections. He identifies a ministerial car and waves his placards. There's a man still standing with his plastic rubbish message on Parliament Square. It strikes me that the Palace of Westminster is a place of protests. S5 and I decide that we have now, in this moment, transformed this place into one about the climate emergency, as we look up and see rebels camped out in the London plane trees by the supreme court (Field Diary 24.04.2019).

The autumn rebellion that started on Monday 7 October 2019 was again focused on central London, with efforts to occupy twelve separate locations. Again, each London location was ascribed a different meaning by XR, occupied by rebels from specific regions of the UK and acted as rallying points for different individual and collective identities. In addition, twenty-five government locations, from MI5 (the UK's domestic counterintelligence and security agency) to The Treasury and The Department for Environment and Rural Affairs were identified as foci for protest during the *uprising*. By 11.00 on the first day of rebellion, eleven of the twelve planned places of protest had been *taken* by XR rebels and during the day a wide range of actions and performances took place on and between these sites adding and gaining meaning

from the places of action. For example, Lambeth Bridge was occupied and renamed the *Faith bridge*. This bridge is adjacent to Lambeth Palace, which is the London home of the Archbishop of Canterbury, his family and two religious' communities. The bridge became a place for XR Faith and XR Southwest England highlighting concerns about global food justice through speeches, singing and prayer.

S5 put on WhatsApp that she was on Westminster Bridge and there was a party atmosphere. Two women had just got married in the middle of the bridge and she felt positive that people were coming together to fight the climate emergency (Field diary 07.10.2019).

On Westminster Bridge, named *The Beacon* by XR, Tamsin and Melissa received a wedding blessing from a celebrant who identified the bridge as a place of *meeting and joining* which was followed by a Ceilidh dance.

These examples, captured and then analysed using activist smartphone doings demonstrate how XR chose places that had meaning to express their activism and though their activism both used that meaning to promote their activism *or* created new meaning in those places. It allowed people with different identities to express their activism in different places and *to* give their meaning to different places. It also allowed activist's difference to be expressed as part of one rebellion and showed the meaning that those activists wanted to be taken from their activism in that place. However, XR's actions are different from many other protests that are spontaneous reactions to present day oppressions. XR's actions were purposely designed to use places to draw attention to the highly complex and diffuse impact of humans on the climate and societies. The meaning XR activists gave to places in taking action in this way often made visible the unequal and slow, but incessant, breakdown of ecosystems with its dramatic tipping points.

Protest camps in place

Founder members of XR acknowledge that it is an organisation built upon the history of resistance and tactics used in UK environmental activism²⁹. Protest camps have a

²⁹ Gail Bradbrook in introducing the film 'Tales of resistance: The battle of Newbury Bypass' on YouTube, paid tribute to previous UK environmentalisms "XR stands on the shoulders of what has gone before" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNjyTA3xaek>

long pedigree in UK activism in general and in environmental activism in particular (Cresswell, 1994; McCurdy et al. 2016; Brown et al., 2017; Fenzel, 2020) making visible the places of contestation and as an activist's repertoire. However, protest camps take considerable efforts and resources to plan, and if they are illegal, to take and defend. They therefore need to have an important place in the operationalisation of the activism to make this worthwhile.

What makes protest camps different from other place-based or space-based social movement gatherings and actions is the sustained physical and emotional labour that goes into building and maintaining the site as simultaneously a base for political action and a space for daily life (McCurdy, et al., 2016, p. 2).

During the Easter rebellion rebels formed protest camps at all the road blockades and in London Royal parks. However, the main protest camp was at Marble Arch with a stage powered by a large array of solar panels overlooking a small, tented village. Speeches from the stage, sometimes interrupted by the police, sometimes by natural breaks, continued during the afternoons and into the evenings.

London was also one of the five places³⁰ in the UK for *Operation Mushroom* activism in the third week of July 2019. On the theme of *We are nature defending itself*, action started outside the Royal Courts of Justice with the road blocked for the day by a large blue boat named after Polly Higgins; a British activist who promoted the recognition of ecocide as a crime and who had died just before the Easter rebellion began. The boat and the protest then moved on, setting up a protest camp in the Millennium Gardens at Waterloo. The protest camp, packed with rebel tents, and a stage for speeches became a place for readings from Sue Hampton, and Leslie Tate, jazz piano, dance and rebels' individual and personal reflections. A large ten-foot-high pink dodo guarded the entrance and became a resting place as well as a place for a series of police officers to stand and take 'selfies'.

As I sit in the entrance to my tent, I can see S2 is toiling away in the big tent next to the stage. She is about to organise some citizens assemblies and then

³⁰ The other places were Glasgow (XR Scotland), Cardiff (XR Wales), Bristol (XR South-West England), Leeds (XR North England).

this afternoon she is off to support the tax strike..... Millennium Green has a feeling of rest and relaxation with locals, workers and even the police lunching amongst the tents. I listen to Leslie Tate read his poems (Field Diary 16.07.2019).

The protest camp was used as a base during the week of action with rebels disrupting the concrete works in Bow, visiting City Hall in support of a tax strike, supporting the 'Friday youth strike' in Parliament Square and demonstrating outside the latest consultation on Heathrow airport expansion.

The Metropolitan Police actions during the first three days of the Autumn rebellion were aimed at stopping sites being taken and protest camps being formed. Initially they focused on Westminster and Lambeth bridges and then moved to other sites. As the police actions displaced rebels from blockades and protest camps most rebels encamped at St James Park and finally the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens.

The Vauxhall Pleasure garden encampment has got even bigger since yesterday with the police clearing other sites. Some rebels are having a lie in; some eating breakfast; some in the sanctuary of the Tea House theatre. All 27 Santander bikes are out from the Vauxhall Walk Cycle stand! They are all being used by rebels taking action somewhere in London. Global justice is here now as well as an Animal Rebellion, XR arts etc. In the big tent people are drying out with clothes hung up above them on string. It's a session about active listening. Jazz hands in the tent. Very XR! I've bumped into quite a lot of people this morning who were at the Bank of England action yesterday. Including those holding the *The enemy doesn't arrive by boat he arrives by limousine* and *Stop funding ecocide: invest in the future*' banners (Field Diary 15.10.2019).

Within a few days the Pleasure Gardens was a large protest camp completely covered with small and large tents, gazebos and marquees, bizarrely overlooked by both the MI6 building (The headquarters of the UK's secret foreign intelligence services) and Vauxhall city farm. These camps allowed not only the use of everyday practices to 'build hoped-for futures in the present' (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010 p. 475), but also training and practice in collective decision making and the use and power of citizen assemblies.

There were some base camps for rebels in churches and community centres during the rebellion, but they were limited in the number of rebels they could accommodate. The work of building, planning and making the camps as well as their maintenance was an integral part of the activism of XR's protest. However, the camps had an important practical use in providing accommodation for rebels during the course of rebellions and as base camps allowing rebels to go into other parts of London during the day to take action. Because the Pleasure Gardens had a convenient bike rental stand, rebels used the bikes to get to actions in other parts of London. The camps acted as sites for rest and recuperation, a place to meet and learn, to imagine different futures, a place to make creative banners and artworks, a place for speeches, contentious politics and a place to plan actions. Without these camps it would not have been possible to have undertaken such sustained and intense actions in many different places over many days with so many rebels from different parts of the country. These protest camps were in very practical terms, central to sustaining and nurturing this contemporary activism during rebellions, rather than being predominantly prefigurative experiences or fetishised as an end in themselves as a lived experience.

Places as territory

XR activists also used places as territory. The taking of territory 'has become a central feature of diverse uprisings around the world in recent years' and was the Occupy movement's defining act (Halvorsen, 2015, p. 401). During the Easter and autumn rebellions, XR not only used the tactic of identifying places as territory to be taken, but also then changed, actively defended and importantly, later lost. During the Easter rebellion Oxford Circus, where Oxford Street meets Regents Street, was blocked by a pink boat with *Tell the truth* written along its side and named after the murdered Honduran indigenous environmentalist Berta Isabel Cáceres. Speakers told the audience of rebels and the public *this is our space*. A climate change denier regularly stood on the railings by one of the tube station entrances in his white T-shirt emblazoned with *Everything is OK*. He engaged the passing public in conversation over his megaphone, in the style of a fairground attraction, mocking the rebels' purpose and activities and seeking to elicit strong reactions. Rebels sat in front of the boat, listening to speeches and music and talking to each other between the

infrequent waves of arrests when the whooping, singing and clapping gave a coherence to the rebels as a movement with common purpose.

During the Easter rebellion, the police arrested individuals in waves to clear and reclaim the areas occupied by rebels. The MPS mainly used laws of place to define where assembly could and could not occur (Section 14 (3) of the Public Order Act 1986). The police progressively cleared sites and threatened individual rebels with arrest when ordering them to disperse. If they did not move, they arrested them. Police also identified particular places where XR *demonstrations* would be lawful. Initially this included a small section of Parliament Square and then by Wednesday 24 April 2019 only the pedestrianised part of Marble Arch. In the first week of the rebellion the police arrested 1,065 people ‘in connection with the ongoing Extinction Rebellion protests’, the vast majority of which were for alleged breaches of Section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986.

On the first day of the Autumn rebellion the Metropolitan Police focused on stopping Westminster Bridge and Lambeth Bridge remaining blocked. By the late evening traffic was flowing again on Lambeth Bridge, the police having cleared about fifty tents and one thousand rebels. Westminster Bridge became a car park blocked by police vans and by 21.30 on this first day of protest two hundred and eighty people had been arrested. On the second day the Metropolitan Police made a concerted effort to reduce the number of places of protest by arresting rebels in waves. In the morning they focused on Marsham Street outside the Home office and after a downpour of rain in the afternoon Whitehall outside Downing Street. During the autumn rebellion the MPS again publicised that they were attempting to limit the place for XR to assemble and take action, by imposing conditions under Section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986. They promulgated that ‘any assembly linked to the Extinction Rebellion “Autumn Uprising” [...] who wish to continue with their assembly MUST go to Trafalgar Square and only assemble in the pedestrianised area around Trafalgar Column”³¹. The MPS continued to try to take back sites and claim back

³¹ Following a hearing on 24 October 2019 the High Court of Justice ruled that this decision by the Metropolitan Police was unlawful, as was by implication the previous condition imposed on 8 October 2019. Subsequently the majority of prosecutions as a result of arrests during the uprising were discontinued by the Crown Prosecution Service. <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Jones-Ors-v-Comm-of-Police-Approved-judgment.pdf>

blocked roads and at 16.00 on Wednesday 9 October 2019 the Territorial Support Group (TSG), with the distinctive "U" on their shoulder epaulettes, stormed Trafalgar Square from its Whitehall entrance³². Shouting at the rebels and pushing them aside they removed the tents, gazebos and road blockades that were not in a pedestrianised area, dragging the resulting detritus to Whitehall and creating a mound of rubbish. The rebels appeared calm, sad, and angry, with one saying, 'but why this mindless destruction! Why are the TSG policing a peaceful and nonviolent protest?' (Field Diary 09.10.2019). By 18.50 on Wednesday 9 October 2019 the MPS were reporting that they had made eight hundred arrests since the Autumn rebellion had begun. On Wednesday 16 October 2019, as a direct challenge to the Metropolitan Police's Section 14 condition, over two thousand XR rebels congregated in Trafalgar Square.

Arrived at Trafalgar square at 1.00pm. While there were speeches to the large crowd, The police tried intimidation tactics. Over twenty police vans surrounded the rebels. One was from the Norfolk constabulary which had the strap line in large letters on the side '*Our Priority is you*'. Groups of three or four police pushed through the crowd in waves without heading in any particular direction. The obvious and purposeful videoing of individuals and small groups, who were standing and listening to the speeches, also appeared to have an intimidatory as well as information gathering purpose. The speeches from the Director of War on Want, The Chief Executive of Friends of the Earth, an ex-superintendent from Cornwall police and elected politicians went on for over an hour and were followed by a series of citizens assemblies (Field Diary 16.10.2019).

Using activist smartphone doings suggests XR activists broader use of place as territory had three important impacts on the activisms. Firstly, the taking, changing, occupying and then loss of territory made a significant contribution to building solidarity and identity, both at affinity group and movement levels, binding people of difference together. The emotional intensity of actions quickly developed a sense of rootedness which made the loss of territory particularly powerful. The nature of policing, what and how territory was taken, kept, used, and lost, how police defined territory, and how boundaries were made and unmade, had a critical role in how

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jc-MGO1cxN4> Losing Trafalgar Square October 2019

solidarity and identity across difference developed during and after the action. Secondly, the range and temporality of territory used allowed activists to model, in different places and temporalities, practices and processes that could be used to change the system with climate justice imaginaries and emotions of living in a changed world. Thirdly, there is something warlike in taking, defending and losing territory, which in being analogous to battling for the environment, makes visible the sacrifices needed to create a changed and better world.

Focusing on place, rather than space, foregrounds the practices and processes of losing territory as being as important as those of taking it, defending it and changing it. With a focus on space one might not notice it being 'abandoned' (Routledge, 1996, p. 520) whilst a focus on place highlights the resistance and emotion that is central to loss. This demonstrates that the concepts of space and place, which are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature, were not interchangeable in this activism, would have led to different understandings, and therefore need to be carefully used and understood in their application.

The place of performance, art and music

Performance, art, and music is central to XR's activism and action design. During induction training as a rebel I was told that 'in XR art matters' (Field Diary 03.04.2019). Performance, art, and music can be important in activism because it not only 'enables activists to intensely feel and express their protest' (Brown and Pickerill, 2009, p. 28), they also affect observers, audiences and agents of the State. Cresswell (1994) in his work analysing the activism at Greenham Common, identified why activists used the tactics of the *carnavalesque* to unsettle their opponents and the conventional, and as a provocation to others to respond, but with the risk that it diverted attention from the activists demands. The women at Greenham used the *carnavalesque* as a demonstration that they refused to accept the conventional *order of things*. They used dancing, singing, painted faces and unusual haircuts as part of their protest, but also to keep themselves amused. However, the huge range of performance, art, music, creativity, and humour used by XR activists was more than the *carnavalesque*. It was more creative and crafted, more targeted and purposely used to generate very specific and powerful emotions rather than to unsettle as the examples below demonstrate. Widely reported protests in March and early April

2019 included: pouring buckets of 'fake' blood onto the streets outside Downing Street as a *Blood of our Children* action; topless rebels gluing themselves to the glass of the viewing gallery in the House of Commons; and, blocking traffic in Oxford Circus for an *alternative* fashion show to draw attention to the exploitative nature of some aspects of the fashion industry and its environmental impacts.

During the Easter rebellion Marble Arch, rather than a place of vehicular circulation with an ever-present traffic hum, became a place for sleeping, rest and recuperation, sustenance, music, theatre, politics, and dance. As mentioned in chapter one, when this phase of action ceased on the evening of Thursday 25 April 2019 a mural (attributed to Banksy) depicting a kneeling child planting a seedling and holding the XR symbol, appeared on a low wall next to the Marble Arch itself. The mural was inscribed with words taken from Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of everyday life* specifically 'from this moment, despair ends and tactics begin' (Vaneigem, 2017, p. 32)³³.

XR borough groups in London then switched most of their energy to planning and preparing for summer uprisings. The East London uprising in July 2019 sought to focus attention on the impact of air pollution on inner London communities and is an example of how the mixing of performance, music and art created meaning and emotion that connected the activists to their *audience* in particular places. The action was branded as *the air that we grieve* with the highlight of a ten-minute performance dance called *Lung* which preceded a *Death March* through the streets of Hackney to London Fields. The Death March was also a performance, headed by a band playing slow melodic funeral dirge music, whilst marchers carried aloft large papier-mache animal skeletons, brightly coloured bees, and animal flags, and a samba band brought up the rear. Residents looked on from windows and doorways and shoppers stopped to watch. They took photos on their phones with many spontaneously clapping and cheering. I examine in detail the emotions associated with these performances and what they do in chapter six. Like other XR *uprisings*, different meanings were ascribed to local places of protest linked to XRs three demands. London Fields was the place to *Tell the truth* with a stage, speeches and citizens

³³ This is from the 2nd Edition using the 1993 translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith

assemblies. The community guerrilla garden, known as *the garden of earthly delights*, established on a derelict car sales lot, a place to *Act now*³⁴. Which reflected that the vacant waste land had been suddenly seized and transformed into a productive and peaceful green space. Hackney town hall became a place *beyond politics* with one rebel in an eye-catching four-metre-high costume depicting mother earth processing from London Fields to the town hall linking the place of *truth* to the place of *politics* by this long slow procession³⁵.

During actions in 2019 and 2020 the arrival and performance of the Red Rebel Brigade (Red Rebel Brigade, 2020) or the XR Drummers in a place, mostly treated by the police as essentially harmless, with their power to change the mood, generated strong emotions and amplified the activism and its message throughout the year of actions. Moment analysis³⁶ of video clips of Rebel Red Brigade performances, in response to the rebel's actions and speeches, demonstrates the generation of emotion and attention in both audience and participants of actions as well as increasing the passivity of the police. For example, on the evening of Friday 11 October 2019 *Writers Rebel* was launched at Trafalgar Square to encourage writers to examine the implications of a climate emergency in their work. A rebel audience listened to speeches and poetry as the Red Rebel Brigade appeared eerily out of a fine mist. XR's innovative performance, art and music had a powerful impact on those performing, other activists, agents of the state, and the public who often became the audience rather than mere observers or passers-by. The Red Rebel Brigade disrupted emotionally and physically, often creating dilemmas for the agents of the state in how to respond, aimed at jarring people out of complacency and invoking powerful and opposed emotions of 'love and rage, grief and hope' (Field Diary 08.10.19), and reshaping how particular places were experienced in that moment.

³⁴ The Garden of Earthly Delights. <https://www.instagram.com/gardenearthlydelights/>, https://www.facebook.com/gardenearthlydelights/?modal=admin_todo_tour

³⁵ Mother Earth <https://twitter.com/XRLondon/status/1150383141883973632>

³⁶ Use of this method is discussed in Chapter two.

Place as a strategy/spatial strategy: The offspring of Occupy?

Spatial strategies have been used as an important component of environmental activism since the 1990's. Pickerill and Krinsky in their analysis of why Occupy mattered, identified how marching, swarming, taking public space and camping in unpermitted places helped in 'articulating the symbolic significance of particular places' (2012, p. 280). Halvorsen identified that Occupy London's spatial strategy limited its impact and effectiveness because it was 'a global movement that became tied to the physical space of occupation' (2017 p. 445).

This research identifies how XR's activists use of different spatial strategies, at different sites of intervention, continuously and intensively, over many days, often simultaneously, magnified their impact. XR activists use the spatialities of the local, the regional, the national and the global and intertwines them. For example, on Monday of the second week of the 2019 Autumn rebellion, the day of the Queen's speech to Parliament, action moved to London's financial district. Activists came from different protest camps and from other places to form a blockade for most of the day at the road intersections outside The Bank of England. Circling the blockade XR Drummers led swarming actions, including a march around all of the narrow streets and major financial institutions pausing briefly as office workers came to the windows to see from aloft what was going on. For Rabbi Jeffery Newman, the Bank interchange became a place of prayer before he was arrested and carried away. XR scientists swarmed with a banner graphically showing the global temperature increase over the last hundred years indicated by vertical stripes in light blue and red giving a clear visual image of the climate emergency. Activists sat on the base of the statute of Wellington, erected in 1844, reading mocked up daily papers with titles such as *The Daily Denier*, and *The Twaddle* with ironic headlines such as 'Don't Panic we've still got 23 trees left' or 'Water polo to become a national sport'. This local action blocking Bank and parading around the city, was focused on the National Bank and global capitalism. Unlike Occupy, XR actions were not tied to one 'physical space of occupation' (Halvorsen, 2017 p. 445) nor did they prioritise the protest camp as the 'intensive place-based strategy of resistance' (Halvorsen, 2017 p.449). When they did take places as part of an action, they used different and varied spatial strategies, simultaneously, continuously and intensively.

Places as memories

Malpas reminds us of ‘the tendency to think of memory as primarily temporal’ rather than understanding memory as being ‘essentially topographical’ (2012, p. 3). XR activism brought memories of the past to create the present, created new memories, changed the public and activists’ perceptions and left traces or residues of the activism which sparked remembering, representation and renewal. A focus on place highlights how memories are connected to the past, linked to imagined futures, generate emotion and promotes storytelling that builds common identity and solidarity³⁷. For example, Marble Arch, chosen by XR activists as its base for coordination and a camp in the Easter rebellion, built memories on the history of that place, and created new memories that were personal, social and physical. The Marble Arch, which overlooked the protest camp, citizens assemblies and stage, was designed to celebrate British victories in the Napoleonic wars and had been moved from Buckingham Palace. This place where Marble Arch now stands, once called Tyburn, was until 1783 the place in London for public executions. It is a place with ‘a symbolic association with free speech and dissent’ (Awcock, 2019 p. 195), where the condemned were entitled to make a speech, which was often political, before their execution.

During the 2019 Autumn rebellion, rebels visited Marble Arch to sit and contemplate the artwork created by Banksy, remembering how they felt during the Easter rebellion and how the place had been changed by their activism and they had been changed by taking the place with other activists. These memories can be powerful and surprising. I was told *I have such a strong memory of a middle-aged woman, in the middle of Marble Arch who spent the whole day kneeling and washing people’s feet as her contribution to the rebellion*. A memory shared and mentioned by a number of rebels. This creation of memories was described by some activists as *I tell my story about being part of the rebellion while being here and we have changed the history of Marble Arch or I feel differently about Trafalgar Square now I have been arrested here*. In the Easter Rebellion, Parliament Square became a place for political speeches with some rebels *camping* high up in the London Plane trees around the square. Some of the rebels talked about how this brought back memories

³⁷ Activism and its relationship with emotion, feelings and affect as well as how they may be understood using non-representational theories is examined in chapter 6.

of the road protests of the 1990's connecting this activism with other successful environmental activism of the past and giving hope for the future. On Waterloo bridge in the Easter Rebellion one woman rebel when challenged by the police to move said 'women built this bridge and I've come to take it back' reminding them that the Bridge was rebuilt primarily by women during the second world war.³⁸ Memories of place and its traces are used by activists to tell the story of their activism to themselves, other activists and audiences. This storytelling was used to make sense of the lifecourse of their activism and memories of place, to evoke emotions that give value and importance to their activism, and sometimes to develop hope.

Extinction Rebellion *In and out of place*

The importance of emotions in activism is well recognised (Woods, et al., 2012) and XR actions that generated feelings of 'in' and 'out' of place produced powerful responses. The nature of emotions in activism was explored by Brown and Pickerill which they conceived broadly as 'hope, fear, humour, happiness, compassion, love, grief, anger, envy, empathy, passion and frustration' (Brown and Pickerill, 2009, p. 26). Generating emotions in this way can be important to activists because 'emotions are a means of initiating political action' (Routledge, 2017 p. 113) and building collective identities (Brown and Pickerill, 2009). During the XR actions I noted the creation of hope, grief, joy, loss, love, excitement, unease or vulnerability and sometimes anger, both in activists and observers as part of the disrupting nature of these actions. Emotion was part of XR activism's dissent and I explore the role of emotion in this activism in detail in chapter six.

Out of place refers to how particular activist practices can challenge everyday assumptions 'by opening up potentials to think, feel and act differently and by challenging the meanings and feelings associated with particular places' (Routledge, 2017 p. 113). The political speeches in Parliament Square during the Easter rebellion managed to both be 'in' place and 'out' of place.

It stopped raining as I spot Diane Abbott striding across Parliament Square with her aide. She is looking for someone and then finds S2, a constituent.

³⁸ Waterloo Bridge is sometimes therefore referred to as the Ladies bridge.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxPNG0QVLf4&t=1s>

She's come to talk to XR Hackney. She says there's going to be a debate in parliament about declaring a climate emergency..... Last week speeches from the podium only 5 metres away, challenging the state directed at the place of politics in the palace of Westminster, but somehow too radical for this place. They jarred (Field Diary 24.04.2019)

Protests in front of the Bank of England in the UK's financial centre, led by men in *city suits* looked on by the group of activists pretending to read 'mocked up' daily newspapers, were *in* the place of national and international capital transactions but kept outside of the buildings and *out* of place. A fashion parade in Oxford Circus, which stopped all traffic through this busy thoroughfare, along a pink catwalk with 'alternative fashions' was *in* the place that sells fashionable clothing but modelled spectacular garments in the middle of the road made from second-hand items. Topless rebels that glued themselves to the glass in the viewing gallery of the House of Commons had all the more impact as behaviour that was *out* of place. So did a cartoon by Martin Rowson of Boris Johnson, the Prime minister of the UK, with his hair and pants on fire drawn on a six-foot-high piece of plywood that appeared in Trafalgar Square during the Autumn rebellion. Women who undertook a topless protest chose Waterloo Bridge, as a place built by women, to be out of place on the *ladies bridge*. Jessica Townsend, as part of the protest, remembered

those women who, two generations ago, built Waterloo bridge and back further to the suffragettes and the pillorying they received. And all those amazing women standing at my shoulder made it seem slightly mortifying that I had even considered staying in bed that morning instead of joining my sisters in the cold (Townsend, 2020).

Perhaps a particularly poignant example is how the actions of the police at the beginning of the Autumn Rebellion in seizing the welfare equipment of disabled activists emboldened them and highlighted their activism. Disabled activists described how this made them feel *out of place*, as did threatening their personal assistants with arrest and it led to nationally reported actions outside New Scotland Yard and anger at the discrimination that it exposed. Activism that highlighted the *out of place* highlighted the need to challenge and resist those established practices, meanings and expectations that are leading to a climate emergency. Whilst the

practices, meanings and expectations that appeared *in place* as a result of the activists' actions often showed what may be possible.

The transformed place of social media in activism

Pink (2012), in thinking about activism and place, argues that by rethinking digital media through a theory of place we can bring together the many processes in which media are implicated in the different media technologies and practices and how they are involved in the constituents of place. She goes on to argue that it would be difficult to study activism without understanding social media as part of the places and practises with which they are involved and that it is crucial to recognise that local places involve strands that originate from elsewhere and that they are multiply present elsewhere, while being *here* as well. These contentions are supported by this research.

Although the use of social media by activists has been well studied, this research has identified the platforms and applications used by XR and their activists are now so numerous and diverse and the use so central to the activism that the place of social media entanglement with activism needs to be revisited. The potential of computer-mediated communication in environmental activism, particularly 'in those groups which organised using non-hierarchical methods' (Pickerill, 2003 p. 179), has been acknowledged for almost two decades. The use of digital media in protests 'in ways that go beyond sending and receiving messages' and can 'change the core dynamics of the action' has been recognised in some research (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012 p. 739). Paolo Gergaudo identified in his study of Occupy social medias' crucial role, which was not fully exploited, of both 'choreography of assembly' and 'generating emotional tension' (2012, p. 103). The way that different generations use social media as part of political participation, particularly youth, has been extensively studied (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015; Holton and Harmer, 2017; Garvey and Miller, 2021). However, the research of XR's actions have revealed three important implications for the understanding of place. Firstly, social media may no longer be best understood as a separate place and it does more than 'break down the barriers between places' (Malpas, forthcoming 2019). Secondly most studies have researched the use and impact of one or two social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter but have not researched the diverse and complex range

of social media platforms and applications that are used by contemporary activists nor why and how they use each platform, how and why they migrate from one platform to another and the impact this has on the activism (Sandoval-Almanzan and Ramon Gil-Garcia, 2014). Thirdly, the place that smartphones play in bringing activists' everyday lives into their activism and the emotion and solidarity that smartphones generate in activists during actions. Smart phones contain the memories and traces of everyday life and intertwine social connections with the activism in complex, surprising and meaningful ways.

Online and social media are an ever-present part of XR's activism, used for developing strategy and refining tactics, mobilising participation, real time management of actions, individual and group personal development and training, briefings, discussion groups, gauging rebels' views, general and media management and communications, creating and disseminating memories and movement building. During the first year XR increasingly exploited the potential of different platforms, applications and social media whilst changing and adapting this use in the light of experience. These applications included Twitter and Facebook with live streaming during actions, Eventbrite, Basecamp, podcasts/podOmatic, WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, Instagram, YouTube, Zoom, secure encrypted email services such as ProtonMail as well as its own websites which were used to manage, develop and promote XR's activism.

During actions social media and online linked, connected and entangled places more than the roaming drumming band³⁹ or the Bristol based performance group from 'The invisible Circus', the 'Red Rebel Brigade' as they moved from place to place. Social media was used in gauging the activists and general public's reaction to actions and implementing a communications strategy. As mentioned in the previous chapter a controversial action to disrupt part of the Underground in East London was the most reported, discussed and debated action of the autumn rebellion. Three small groups of rebels attempted to disrupt the London Transport underground services at Stratford, Canning Town and Shadwell. The potential action had been widely discussed by XR rebels beforehand on social media with polling of activists

³⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgNXg93vYH4> XR Drummers April 2019

about whether it should go ahead. The action was filmed and widely disseminated on social media with footage of members of the travelling public shouting angrily at the activists and in one instance dragging an activist from the roof of a tube train. David Lammy MP Tweeted. 'Please guys take a leaf out of the Gandhi and Martin Luther King book of peaceful protest. Upsetting the general public travelling to work in an environmentally sound way is plain stupid. Are you going to disrupt cyclists next' (Lammy, 2019). XR extensively interacted and used a wide range of platforms, moving from one to another, seeking to exploit the potential of each whilst migrating away from platforms quickly that were considered less private or secure.

Contemporary UK environmental activism is now so interweaved by social media and the use of smartphones that understanding these environmentalisms and their shaping of environmental movements, actions and interactions, without being informed by the data generated in these places, is likely to be partial or misleading. We construct our sense of purpose, identity and belonging by how we relate to each other and the places we live our everyday and activist lives, which now includes our smartphones and social media. This intensifies place-based actions, allows activists to respond to what is happening elsewhere in real time, gives activists contact and connectivity to other places, makes activists more visible and incorporates social media and smartphones into the understanding of the place that activism occupies at any one time.

Being in a Place

Rebellion's, revolutions, mutinies, uprisings, revolts and activists all happen in a place. I now consider four important questions that arise from how place gives insights into XR's contemporary activists. Firstly, how can a geographical focus on place change our understanding of these activists? Secondly, what do XR's experiences tell us about how contemporary environmental activism now operates? What has changed, what is new, what is the same? Thirdly, which of XR approaches to place examined in this research were most successful in achieving XR's aims, and which were less so? Lastly, does XR lead to us reformulating what we mean by place? Does this extend our understanding or challenge them?

Firstly, how does a geographical focus on place change our understanding of environmental activism?

Place is a concept that geographers bring to research to gain different and deeper insights and to develop and improve our understanding of the political, the social and social change. Often its value has not been fully recognised by other disciplines. For example, 'Geography was not a discipline recognised as having much to contribute to debates on human sexuality' until the 1990s (Hubbard, 2018, p. 1295). Geography has a long history of grappling with the slippery concept of place and 'the relatively recent resurgence in interest in place across disciplines and in the wider world represents an opportunity for geography to situate itself at the centre of a lively disciplinary debate' (Cresswell, 2014, p. 1). There are a wide range of disciplines, from politics to sociology, social psychology to history, that seek to understand what activism is and what it does. Sociologists when researching activism may pay attention to issues of structure and agency in their analysis, whilst geographers are likely to interpret meaning through activism's interrelatedness with spatiality.

...physical presence-as a place-both bound the protestors together in a concrete way and sent more of a message to the watching world (Cresswell, 2014, p. 6).

Moreover, this focus on space challenges social movement studies to move beyond merely conceptualising the extent of space or the compression of space by time.... and instead to more thoroughly explore the strategic use and occupation of space as symbolic (Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012, p. 281).

Geographers of social change add spatiality in general, and place in particular, to the analysis and understanding of social manifestations and social change. In addition, geography helps us to understand the complexity of spatialities. For example, *place* and *space* are different. Spaces are scientific, open and attached whilst places are intimate, peopled and full of emotion. As Anderson describes the difference 'place then is the counterpoint of space: places are politicised and cultured; they are humanised versions of space' (Anderson, 2015, p. 51).

Place foregrounded the spatial strategies in XR's activism. Whether it was marching, taking and losing territory or the position, location or nature of physical encampments. It brought into focus how local, regional, national and global activism

are interdependent and how they inform each other. As Pickerill and Krinsky (2012) reminds us, impactful activism often *think global and act local*. A geographical focus posits questions such as why are activism and protests at certain places and what does that do? For example, XR's activism in London, as the centre of government and a capital and world city, had more impact than actions in other cities encouraging *activist tourism* with XR activists coming to the national capital city for two weeks of activism.

XR activists performed their activism spatially. Targeting fossil fuel companies, those that finance them and the fashion industry at their centres, made their role in the climate emergency visible. When we create meaning in a locale and then become attached to it in some way, it becomes a place. 'Naming is one of the ways space can be given meaning and become place' (Cresswell, 2014, p. 15). XR's activists sort to give meaning to places and therefore 'these places can be named, located and objected to' (Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012, p. 280). XR's activism always had a spatial context and the performance of their activism in different places, such as highly visible public places, less visible home places or invisible online places showed the implications of visibility for those activism. Understanding the place of social media and real time use of smartphones showed how XR's activism imported and was informed by events, values and practices from other places. XR's activism demonstrated that place was always under construction and changing and was a key element of making their activism impactful.

Secondly, what do XR's activists' experiences tell us about how these contemporary environmental activism now operates? What has changed, what is new, what is the same?

In chapter three I identify eight features of environmental activism that have historically characterised its performance in the UK. These features give a framework for evaluating how this contemporary activism now operates. Tensions between radical and reformist environmentalism were still present, with XR demanding that other environmental organisations become more radical, whilst itself being criticised for not being radical or inclusive enough. However, I noticed considerable message and campaign coordination between XR activism and other radical and reformist activists and organisations with similar targeting of fossil fuel

companies and coordinated actions. In addition, many activists were members of both radical and reformist organisations, taking action in different places. What was unusual about XR activism, was that despite its demand to move beyond politics, it framed its radical environmentalism around specific demands without articulating what the solutions would be. It therefore created and shaped a place in which people with substantially different political analysis and leanings could take radical action together in the same place. Political conservatives and media continued to recycle stereotypes of historical activism. However, the actuality of XR activism was very different from these stereotypes. For example, in my affinity group there were younger and older rebels and everyone either worked or had retired, which is an age and employment profile supported by other recent research (Saunders, et al., 2020). Having been involved with a wide range of actions I never saw anyone taking drugs or drinking alcohol; or for that matter smoking roll ups! Some of the activists having been involved in environmentalism for many years brought the memories of those activism into the present and often shared them creating a sense of eldership. I examine in more detail this concept of eldership in chapter five.

XR's activism demonstrate that contemporary environmental activism is never only local, regional, national, or global. It is completely interconnected and these scales are interdependent. The activist self is always a spatialized self with one's situatedness in the world requiring a consideration and understanding of how activism can operate at all scales simultaneously. XR activism created a place for rebels with a wide range of topics of environmental concern to come together in one place and take action. They were able to choose specific places to express their activism reflecting those concerns, whilst taking action as part of a wider movement. For example, XR Farmers taking action with XR Faith and XR Scientists with Animal Rebellion. Some XR activists identified concerns about their strategy, tactics and members, in relation to difference and diversity, within months of being formed and have been taking action to address these issues since then. XR centrally chose *not* to position itself as just one part of environmentalism and highlight that there are many organisations who pay more attention to environmental justice, race or colonialism. However, XR activism provide a different place and spaces for activists. Activists do not need to be invited to be members of XR and then approved or accepted. They just need to agree to XR's vision and values with nobody actively

monitoring compliance. The emergence of XR's activism was rapid with activists still taking regular high profile actions, but some of the founding members such as Gail Bradbrook and Roger Hallam have moved onto other projects and membership and actions were curtailed and reduced both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. XR activists recognize that their repertoire and tactics are built on a long history of radical environmental and other activism. What is new was that activists choose places to make themselves vulnerable to arrest, with arrest a central tactic of many actions. Those who made themselves vulnerable to arrest were given the opportunity for intensive arrestee support before, during and after actions. These XR activists purposefully and intensively created meaning by naming each action and place of action to give it significance. In addition, the planning, creative and humorous nature of actions have not previously been as pervasive and widespread in which the importance of place was so carefully considered.

Thirdly, which of XR's approaches to place were most successful in achieving their aims and which were less so?

This chapter has explored eight aspects of the concept of place that were intertwined with XR's activism. It describes and analyses how XR activists used the entanglement of place with the creation of meaning, protest camps, territory, performance, spatial strategies, memories, 'in' and 'out' of place and social media in their activism. XR's explicit aims were to demand that the government tells the truth about climate change. That government acts immediately to avoid catastrophic climate change and biodiversity loss and to move beyond politics⁴⁰ with more deliberative democracy. Implicit aims included moving the climate emergency into the centre of national and international debate and concern, building alliances with other movements and making connections in the public consciousness between extractive capitalist practices and dangerous climate change.

XR activists carefully chose places of protest to create meaning from that place and chose places for activists with different individual and collective identities to take action and rally round. Creating this meaning sustained activists during long periods. It supported groups with similar identities and some of these meanings were

⁴⁰ This demand has now been recast to *Be the change*, which continues to demand more deliberative democracy but also focuses on the importance of environmental justice

communicated to, and understood by, observers as well as being disseminated more widely by the media. For example, Christian Climate Action created spaces for faith communities to take action together, with their message of sacrifice and need for action on the climate emergency, communicated in both the mainstream and religious media. Protest camps were central to sustaining and nurturing activists during the long periods of rebellion but were less visible than other protest actions. Using places as territory was highly visible and disruptive, often using memorable objects to blockade and keep territory. The Pink boat that blocked the Oxford Street and Regent Street intersection has become an iconic symbol of the Easter 2019 rebellion. The emotional intensity that taking territory created in the rebels was one of the contributing factors that sustained actions over long periods. Creative performance, art and music was also sustaining to activists, emotionally resonant, often eye catching and jarring. It engaged directly with passers-by, who became audiences for performances about the climate emergency. Those audiences often acknowledged their engagement by taking photographs or videos and sometimes clapping and cheering. Mobile spatial strategies such as marching and swarming, as well as static spatial strategies of lying down in the road in front of, or *locking-on* to, symbolic places allowed actions widely throughout London. This spread the actions more broadly and created moments of surprise and challenge. Memories understood in particular places, as well as memories created in places, firstly helped to interpret the significance of actions and secondly created powerful and surprising emotions. Actions that demonstrated being *in* or *out* of place resulted in high levels of media interest and reporting as well as encouraging activists to further actions. For example, as a result of the police confiscating disabled activists welfare equipment, the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police in New Scotland Yard was targeted for many days which was reported widely on social media and also in the mainstream press. Social media transformed the connectivity of activists in all the places that they took action and as a place of action itself widely disseminated what and why protest was being undertaken nationally and internationally.

Fourthly, do XR activisms lead to us reformulating what we mean by place? Does this extend our understanding or challenge them?

The strategy, tactics and actions of XR's activisms demonstrate that place can be entangled with activisms in complex ways; with place and activism creating and

shaping each other. A summary of the eight characteristics of XR's use of place strategically and tactically in its activism are summarised in Table 5.

| Place engaged strategically | Place engaged tactically |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Creating Meaning | Naming and renaming Coalescing collective identities and concerns Highlighting difference Using and changing iconic places often by jarring Purposeful action design |
| Performance, Art and Music | Protest marches as performance Provoking reaction and acting out dissent Evoking/composing specific emotions Exploiting vulnerability Creating ephemeral and permanent installations Using humour Creating an audience from observers |
| A Spatial Strategy | Multiple strategies simultaneously Multiple strategies continuously Multiple strategies intensively Centring performance as a tactic |
| Protest Camps | As a resource tactic As a repertoire As a sustaining and enabling practice As a performance As a lived experience |
| Territory | As a provocation and a location for dissent Developing rootedness Risking arrest Taking, holding, changing and losing places |
| Memories | Using histories Provoking storytelling of past and future imaginaries Creating traces to be translated and interpreted |
| In and out of place | Challenging meaning and feelings Using humour and vulnerability Highlighting discrimination Signposting possibilities |
| Social Media | Co-creating a sense of place Mobilising participation across difference Framing and shaping language Communications and actions management Rapid movement building Decentralised decision-making processes Smart phones bringing self into the activism |

Table 5: A summary of the eight characteristics of XRs use of place in its activism (Source author).

Analysis of these characteristics of the entanglement demonstrates that there are common threads. For example, several aspects seek to jolt people to different understandings, highlight how those places were previously differently experienced;

triggering specific emotional responses, such as hope and grief, in places previously used for shopping, as a tourist experiences, or formal politics. Understanding the importance of emotion in mobilisation, XR activists purposefully entangled place with their activism to move people to action across difference. Through performance, art and music XR engaged people who otherwise may just have been observers, inviting them to become an audience, drawing them into the action and then challenging them to become more engaged. By using humour and vulnerability XR activists created a place for its activism to be heard. By naming and renaming places XR activists both created meaning and claimed and reclaimed the language of the climate emergency. By asserting ownership of territory and places, rather than capture or tenancy, many activists felt powerful and legitimate which was expressed in the frequent chanting of *Whose streets? Our streets*. Understanding this complexity and how all these different uses of place are interdependent, allows us to see the common threads, and more deeply translate and interpret the activism. Noticing and examining this complexity of place activism/entanglement allows us to see how different dimensions of place work together to amplify each other.

This study highlighted some important characteristics of a sense of place. For example, how the nature and strength of personal connection with particular places and its traces impact on the emotions generated by actions in a place. Data gathered by Activist smartphone doings identified that when territory was taken by activists, and then lost, the nature of personal connection with a place produced different feelings of ownership, sometimes reinforcing who that place *belonged* to or a sense of ownership of that place. A sense of identity that these were *my streets, my place*. Others with a different sense of place and less connection expressed a vulnerability by losing territory in that place. This ongoing negotiation of the meaning of place between activists, and those who they oppose changes meaning and gives different meanings to places. Sense of place also draws our attention to what is not there. What is absent in a place, as much as what is manifest. For example, the absence of pigeons in Trafalgar Square being as noticed as the performance of activism in that place. The place of protest camps in XR's activism was highlighted for their practical functionality and the importance of the siting of encampments, as much as their performance as a protest in their own right. XR adopted a range of mobile, as well as static, spatial strategies. Unlike Occupy which was somewhat constrained by

the static nature of its strategies (Halvorsen, 2017), this allowed the targeting of numerous locations across London over many days. When thinking spatially about what taking, keeping and losing territory does, the importance of not using the concepts of space and place interchangeably becomes manifest. The different concepts draw your attention to different understandings. When losing territory, place foregrounds that *abandonment* and creates new understandings of that activism. Activists of faith make meaning visible by juxtaposing sacrifice and their understanding the beauty of God's nature with humans' role in the unequal and slow but incessant breakdown of ecosystems with its dramatic tipping points. When action was taken at Canning Town, Stratford and Shadwell on the London Transport underground, meaning that was not what was intended by those activists became apparent. The meaning taken by targeting public transport and working people travelling to work was that; The activists were not working but disrupting public transport and low carbon transport methods. This distracted and obscured the meaning that the activists wished people to derive from their action.

Performance and art in XR, with road blockades that were creative, music and art that was sustaining and revitalising, significantly changed the sense of that place and its possibilities. Performances evoked very specific emotions in a place and associated those emotions with that place. In using memories from previous activisms, such as tree climbing, or creating memories like Banksy's artwork at Marble Arch, traces were created which changed those places over different temporalities. Playing with, purposely using, or even stumbling across activisms that were in and out of place, created new activisms or demanded attention from observers, audiences and the media. XR's activisms extends our understanding of how we understand place in relation to smartphones and social media and how they connect places together in personal and interesting ways. *There* becomes *here*, and vice versa. This place becomes part of elsewhere and perhaps more importantly, social media accessed by smartphones whilst on the move, stretches places and becomes a place in its own right.

Much of the literature which examines the concept of place including the place activism entanglement prioritise the examination either with narrow aspects of the concept of place such as location site or social media, does not differentiate

adequately between place and space or engages with multiple specialties. This research focused on how place may shape the impact that this environmental movement had in achieving change and demonstrates that by focusing on place and not confusing it with other spatial concepts such as space there can be different understandings. Finally, XR's activism demonstrate how central the understanding of different scales is to understanding place/activism entanglements.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the entanglement of place and contemporary environmental activism to broaden the debate, both within geography and between disciplines in the social sciences, about the significance of complexity in place/activism entanglements. It examines in detail XR activism and its actions in London from October 2018 to October 2019 in relation to different dimensions of place. This research with its analysis of XR's activism in the first year on the streets of London, demonstrates the importance of paying attention to the interweaving of place and activism which generated new insights into how activists choose to express their activism, how place shapes their activism and how activism changes those places. It highlights how conceptualising place with all of its complexity and engaging with that complexity allows a deeper understanding of activism and how to make it impactful and effective in demanding change. Researching individual elements of the place/activism entanglement broadens our understanding but without examining its complexity and interdependency important aspects of this activism and its impact are not fully understood.

This research identifies why activism and protests are in certain places and what they do. A geographical focus on place changes our understanding of activism. Activists in choosing places make messages more tangible to local and wider audiences. Activism always have a spatial context and the performance of activism is different in different places with the place chosen informing its visibility and impact. XR activism demonstrate that they are never only local, regional, national or global. They are completely interconnected, and these scales are interdependent. XR activism, by using place productively, facilitated rebels with a wide range of concerns to come together in one place to take action. They purposefully entangled place with their activism to move people to action across difference. XR's activists

use of place demonstrated the importance of mobile spatial strategies with place and activism creating and shaping each other. Protest created meaning from that place and creating this meaning sustained activists during long periods. Understanding how and why activists use place is significant and important. For example, by asserting ownership of places, rather than capture or tenancy, many activists felt powerful and legitimate. It created a sense of identity, that these were my streets and my place, and exploited the potential of organising spaces.

Chapter 5

Generations

I saw a tweet from Extinction Rebellion Sheffield today, which made me reflect upon whether Extinction Rebellion has managed to do something different with the different generations and the extent to which it has managed to bring them together to take action. “What I’m seeing of Extinction Rebellion is that it’s really multi-generational. I think it would be good if it were more widely recognised that as a group it’s bringing together people from different backgrounds and sharing a real deep concern” (Field Diary 06.04.2019).

The Extinction Rebellion newsletter today: Day 5-Police turn pirates-highlighted that about 20 teenage rebels occupied a road beside the roundabout at Heathrow airport between terminals two and three, raising a banner that poignantly asked: Are we the last generation? (Field diary 20.04.2019).



Figure 12: Banner at Buckingham Palace (Source author).

An important aspect of this research has been to investigate how people, across difference become active on climate change and what sustains that personal and collective activism in order to understand how activists’ impact can be developed and maintained. In this chapter I examine how and why generations and lifecourse are important in the analysis and deeper understanding of this UK contemporary environmental activism. Central to an understanding of this environmental activism, which is a response to contemporary anthropogenic climate change, is a temporality that is expressed in generations. This is because anthropogenic climate change has

been caused by previous generations, is not being yet adequately addressed by current generations, and will impact mostly on younger and future generations.

I argue that:

- A broad range of generations are now part of this contemporary environmental activism.
- An understanding and appreciation of generations helps explain and inform what activities and actions activists are prepared and able to take.
- Generations are a key dimension in activist solidarity in this contemporary activism.
- Generations inform and shape activist identity, often involving storytelling about lifecourse.
- Previous and current human actions which result in future, but often uncertain, impacts on climate and the environment (sometimes decades later) engages generations as a powerful driver in mobilising activists. Noticing how activist generations intersect not with gender, class or race but with the anthropocene and nature give different but important insights.

A personal story

My life course has sensitised me to noticing the impact of generations on activism. I've always been interested in environmental issues but distracted by building a career in the National Health Service (NHS) and bringing up a family meant my attentions were often elsewhere. However, having left my last job, as an NHS chief executive I went back into academia and read for a full-time degree in Landscape Management. Central to this undergraduate study was gaining an understanding of what sustainability meant in practice and how climate change was already affecting landscape management and land use practices. I noticed the impact people were having on the environment as I walked my kids up the hill to school each morning. I had the opportunity to talk to them about their hopes and aspirations. Spending more time with my children and family, I started to have the space to think more about the world that they would inherit. It let me foreground anthropogenic climate change as the biggest challenge facing the world today and see this clearly.

In becoming active on environmental issues generally, and with XR in particular, I noticed how generations helped shape impactful activism. I paid attention to how inter-generational friendships and solidarities developed unexpectedly whilst many academics wrote about intergenerational conflicts. I noticed youth and young adults finding their voice and the passion they had for their environment and halting climate change, with all of its catastrophic consequences. I saw the actions young people initiated and engaged with, how leaders emerged and how they built a movement. I noticed older people taking action. Some re-finding an activist vigour and passion from their youth. Some, as me, are coming afresh to fight for a different future for their children. I saw how parenthood became visible in activism and how it played a role in the nature and manifestation of that activism. I noticed how the young and the old, separately, and together, consciously, and unconsciously used emotion, feelings and affect to build solidarity, influence others and achieve change. So, coming to activism, at this point in my life, it is this insight about generations that I will explore in this chapter and the place of emotion, feelings and affect more fully in the next chapter.

The social sciences have generally paid less attention to the horizontal divisions in society, such as age and generation, than it has to vertical divisions such as class and gender (Gillard, 2004, p. 107). These vertical divisions are important in understanding contemporary environmental activism. For example, in XR I noticed how women shaped strategy, tactics, movement values, leadership style, communications, and activist repertoires in new ways. Through a feminist lens you might see something different. Much has been written about XR and race and class so I could equally have examined class, race as well as gender and their intersectionality. However, in this chapter, I want to examine and explore the importance of generations in understanding contemporary UK environmental activism, which is under researched and is tangible to me given my lifecourse. Paying attention to the intersections of the anthropocene and nature with generations allows us to notice how activists place themselves in a particular generation, how they perceive other activists to be part of their generation or a member of another, and what the consequences of this are which gives fresh insights.

The concept of generations

The notion of generation is a widely used and understood concept in the 'everyday world' to make sense of differences in age and common experiences and to 'locate selves and other persons within historical time' (Pilcher, 1994, p. 481). In the literature there is no common understanding of the concept of generation and even those definitions that at first glance appear similar are often strongly nuanced (Vincent, 2005). Geographers have tended to focus on the young and the old and not on the relationships within and between age groups or generations. For example, research on age in geography has become 'highly compartmentalised into separate literatures on younger and older generations and rarely intersect' (Vanderbeck, 2007, p. 200) and as a result geographies of intergenerational relationships are substantially under researched. Research into intergenerational solidarity within activism in general, and environmental activism in particular, is limited. Where research does focus on the relationship between generations it often focuses on the conflicts and tensions between generations or the concept of intergenerational justice. Research has historically identified much of British protest and dissent particularly environmental activism as youth led.

Some studies have identified how different age groups have become more and more segregated, at least in the minority world and see this as a problematic development. Attias-Donfut and Arber (2000) argue that there are at least five dimensions in understanding different generations, with some fuzziness and overlapping between these different meanings. They firstly identify that generations may be understood as cohorts representing groups of people born at similar times. Secondly, lineage in families between grandparents, parents and children often used in kinship studies (Pilcher, 1994). Thirdly, as a measure of time in order to understand the general history of ideas and human progress. Fourthly, people born in the same era who lived through a period of social change and develop a specific generational consciousness or collective identity which influences their attitudes and behaviours and distinguishes them from other generations. Lastly, *welfare generations* which distinguish essentially between those that are participating in employment and others. The concept of welfare generations draws out how people contribute to society and focuses on the generations in education, those in work and those in retirement.

An example of the fuzziness and overlapping of these different meanings is demonstrated in work on generations in social science that has developed from linking *social forces* and *cohorts*' meanings. The *social forces* perspective which 'views generations as interrelated and multi-dimensional social groups that take shape in the flow of history' and the *cohort* perspective that views generations 'as collections of people born in a given time period' (Lyons and Kuron, 2013, p. 141).

More recently Duffy (2021) argues that there are three intertwined explanations for how all attitudes, beliefs and behaviours change overtime. These being cohort effects, period effects, and life cycle effects. Generational cohort effects highlight different attitudes, beliefs and behaviours generated as a result of socialisation in different conditions from other generations which remain distinct from other cohorts even as they age. Duffy's period effects, which combines Attias-Donfut and Arber's third and fourth dimension of generations, are the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of a society that change in a consistent way across all age groups often in response to major events or crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Lifecycle generational effects focus on how people change as they age or as a result of major life events such as leaving home, having children or retiring. Duffy argues that the three effects analysed individually and collectively give new and different understandings with this generational thinking being a powerful analytical tool. In analysing the generation/activist entanglement in this chapter I draw upon both Attias-Donfut and Arber's and Duffy's constructions of generations.

Cohorts

The cohort perspective was originally associated with the demographer Ryder 'which seeks to bring precision to the ambiguous construct of generation' (Lyons and Kuron, 2013, p. 141). Ryder argues that generational location is best represented by the concept of cohorts that are 'the aggregate of individuals who experienced the same event within the same time interval' (Ryder, 1965, p. 845). There are problems that flow from this understanding of generations including identifying and justifying cohorts and their boundaries (Gillard, 2004, p. 109); Indeed, Lyons and Kuron argue that 'there is a great variation among studies in the sets of generations that are

compared, and studies compare as few as two and as many as eight' (Lyons and Kuron, 2013, p. 142).

Many researchers have adopted a four cohort generational analysis although the cohort year ranges vary (Rudolph, et al., 2018, p. 46). These generations are pre-second world war, post-second world war to the 1960's, 1960's to mid 1980's and mid 1980's to the present (Lyons and Kuron, 2013, p. 141). More recent literature identifies an additional generation with people born from just before the turn of this century to the present (Shatto and Erwin, 2017; Arkhipova et al., 2019; Duffy, 2021). These generations are described as the traditionalist, silent or pre-war generation, the baby boomers (recently just called Boomers), and generation X, generation Y (also often referred to as millennials) and Generation Z (sometimes called centennials). A pictorial representation of generations informed by Ipsos MORI's conception of age cohorts is in Figure 13.

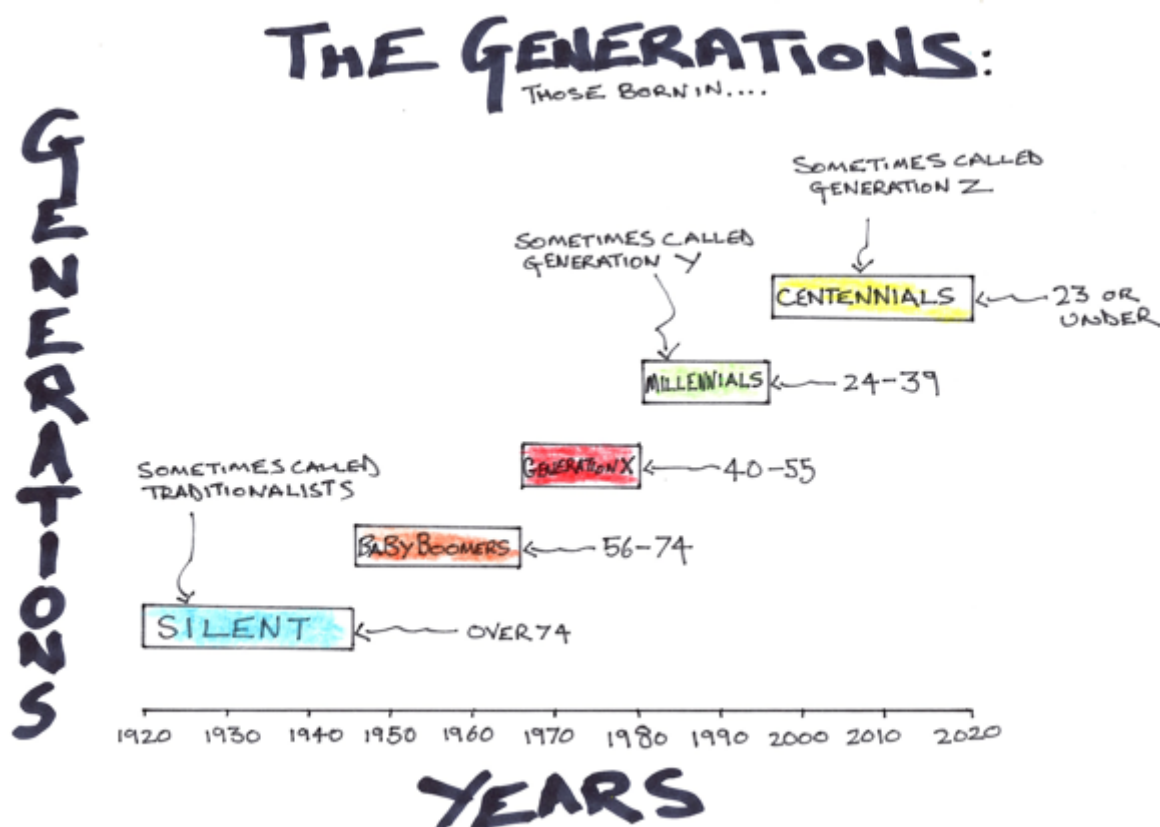


Figure 13: The generations defined: adapted from Ipsos MORI Generations using a 2020 baseline (Source author).

It is immediately apparent that any cohort definition of generation is likely to be highly geographically and socially dependent.

Generation-babble is one of the rare political trends that really is all the fault of the baby boomers, because post Second World War population growth is a real and discreet social and economic trend. This is a challenge for democracies, because the boomers are a powerful electoral group and for policymakers because the boomers will make increasing demands on healthcare infrastructure in the coming decades. That doesn't mean the 20 year old window illuminates a real cohort. That is obvious when we seek to make comparisons between countries. Is a baby boomer in Israel, the first generation to be born in a new democracy, comparable to a South Korean boomer growing up in an autocracy? (Bush, 2022).

The common experiences that are most frequently identified in the literature as being formative are those identified in the minority world and particularly Europe. *Where* you were born often remains more important than *when* you were born, with Duffy coining the epithet *country before cohort*. However, because cohorts are so widely used in everyday life and in academic literature when framing debates about age and generations it is an important concept to bear in mind when analysing relationships and interactions between people of different ages and generations. In addition, I have noticed that some activists place themselves in one of these generations and it has become part of their identity. I explore this briefly later in this chapter.

Periods of change: The social, the political and the environmental

The social forces perspective, promoted by the Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim in his 1923 seminal essay, *The problem of Generations*, argued that people are significantly influenced by the socio-historical environment that predominates during their youth (Mannheim, 1952). This social identity being formed by common and often traumatic experiences. Mannheim's social forces contribution to the understanding of generations has only been 'hesitantly embraced within the social sciences over the decades' (Vanderbeck, 2007, p. 205). His concept of generation has two elements. The first a common location in historical time (generational location) and the second a distinct consciousness of historical position (generational style). Mannheim's approach therefore emphasises the 'cultural distinctiveness of

generations' (Gillard, 2004, p. 108), or what Pilcher calls 'distinctive consciousness' (Pilcher, 1994, p. 483).

This is a useful concept when people are subject to large scale common experiences in which their social or cultural groups are impacted in similar ways.

What unites these genuinely divergent groups is that they have been influenced by specific events. What matters is whether your cohort is defined by the end of war in Europe, COVID, the second intifada, advances in cardiovascular medicine or the widespread adoption of mobile telecommunications. Not shallow questions about whether you leave answer phone messages or have the decency just to send a text (Bush, 2022).

Large scale events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, are likely to affect all generations in substantial ways even if they impact different generations differently. It is however a useful concept in thinking about the impact of technology developments such as smartphones and social media and how they impact different generations. It is also helpful in assessing the extent that an understanding of the potential impact of the climate emergency influences people to take action separately and together.

Lineage and Lifecycle

The concept of lineage relates to a person's familial connections/position which is more than just a person's age. It is about being a great-grandparent, grandparent, parent, young person or child as well as a niece, nephew, uncle or aunt. There is historical evidence that lineage and life cycle is significant in environmental activism, and that the level of involvement in activism has historically related to generation and age. As identified in chapter three most activists involved in the environmental direct-action groups of the 1990's in the UK were university educated, middle class and young (Wall, 1999). As Johnson and Schwadel conclude 'the environmental movement has historically been strongly associated with, and remains focused on, youth' (Johnson and Schwadel, 2018, p. 16). Historically members of protest oriented environmental groups tended to be younger than average whilst those who are members of more conservation focused 'environmental groups are not young

and are far less likely to join protest groups' (Tranter, 2010, p. 413). My research identifies that this is changing.

Welfare generations

Welfare generations draw a distinction between those that are in education, those that are in work whether full or part time and those that have retired from work. Foregrounding welfare generations helps pay attention to younger and older activists and welfare's impact on where, when and how activists have the capacity to take action. It highlights young people who are not yet eighteen and therefore are often treated differently by the state: constraining their personal autonomy and decision making. Those that are in education and therefore mostly not financially independent do however often have the time and flexibility to be involved in activism. Those employed who often have some financial independence are frequently constrained by the time they have available to be active. Those who are retired, who may have the flexibility in time that they can use to become active, often also have financial independence. I use this concept of welfare generations below in the analysis identifying if activists are in work, education or some sort of retirement.

Generation as a provocation and explanation of activism

This section explores how an understanding and appreciation of generations in this activism helps explain and inform what activities and actions activists are prepared and able to take. On Wednesday the 3 April 2019 there was a meeting at XR's London headquarters on the fourth floor of 184 Drummond Street and with ten⁴¹ other activists I formed an affinity group for support and to take action together.

The room filled up to full and we were sorted by our views about what we thought was violence and how prepared we were to get arrested. Activists formed into affinity groups. The groups seemed to form organically. Largely by chance because of who you had been sitting/standing next to, but I noticed almost all of the groups seemed to have younger and older members (Field diary 03.04.2019).

We decided to call our affinity group the beekeepers and set up a WhatsApp group for communicating between ourselves and to organise actions. (During the Easter

⁴¹ The identities of the other ten activists have been anonymised and I refer to them as B1-B10.

2019 rebellion both the local XR group and our affinity group moved to the more secure applications Signal and ProtonMail⁴²). On the following Sunday evening we went to a very cold hall in Hackney, huddled around electric radiators and had an evening of non-violent direct action (NVDA) training, practising how to deal with confrontation and de-escalation. We talked about the implications for each one of us, given our personal circumstances of taking action under the banner of XR and risking arrest. We then moved on to the Brownswood pub to plan what actions we wanted to take as part of the forthcoming Easter rebellion. Our first action together was the following Friday evening where an alternative fashion show blocked Oxford Circus. The closing of the streets was facilitated by the police at exactly 6.30 pm and no one appeared to be arrested. With B1 and B5 I handed out leaflets and spoke to passers-by to explain what we were doing and why. Other activists were involved in the show itself.

XR Youth

An important part of XR is XR Youth with close links to other climate youth movements such as School Strikes for Climate (Skolstrejk för klimatet) or Fridays for Future (FFF) which have promoted weekly protests as part of their tactics, most recently with the global earth strike on 24 September 2021.

In March 2019 a handful of young XR members formed XR Youth. Talia Woodin was a student in London at the time. She says: “My involvement in activism predated my birth. Both my parents were involved in environmental activism.... I was brought up in those circles and I wanted to go down that route when I was older” (Melia, 2021).

During the first London rebellion in Easter 2019 there were opportunities for the different generations to explore how they could work together to fight for climate justice. There were multiple citizens assemblies held over the two weeks in the Marble Arch protest camp which addressed generational responsibilities as part of their discussions. However, there was also clear signposting throughout the

⁴² Signal is a cross-platform centralised encrypted instant messaging service that can send one-to-one and group messages, which can include files, voice notes, images and videos. It can also be used to make one-to-one and group voice and video calls. It uses standard cellular telephone numbers as identifiers and secures all communications with end-to-end encryption. ProtonMail is an end-to-end encrypted email service.

Rebellion of the importance of generations to this activism. For example, I was in the audience on Easter Sunday 21 April 2019 when activists from two distinct generations took to the stage at the Marble Arch protest camp and spoke to an audience of well over a thousand. Alongside Greta Thunberg, the Swedish sixteen-year-old founder of Skolstrejk för klimatet, was eighty-two year old Phil Kingston, a retired probation officer, catholic member of Christian Climate Action, grandfather of four and XR activist. Seated, he talked about his longing for his grandchildren and their descendants to be safe and secure. Standing next to him Greta Thunberg said that it wasn't governments but 'The people in Extinction Rebellion and the children school striking for the climate we are the ones making a difference' (Field Diary 21.04.2019).

Four days later Phil Kingston stood on the roof of a Docklands light railway train at Canary Wharf with five other Christians in protest at the London financial centre's funding of fossil fuel companies which are central to the developing climate emergency. He carried an XR banner in bright yellow, emblazoned with *Don't jail the Canaries*. Following a crown court trial which ended in the acquittal of all six activists on the 10 December 2021, Phil Kingston made a statement about why he took action.

I had three motivations: My grandchildren, my faith and the poorest people on earth who have contributed the least to carbon dioxide emissions and are suffering the greatest impacts. I knew I might go to prison. This was acceptable to me. I was prepared to take the risk (Field Diary 10.12.2021).

The other activists acquitted were aged 62, 58, 54, 48 and 39. This was one of the first cases tried in the Crown Court following the Supreme court's ruling on Director of Public Prosecutions (Respondent) v Ziegler and others (Appellants) which found that The Human Rights Act protected a person's rights to cause a certain degree of disruption before a public Order Act offence is committed.⁴³ I examine the entanglement of faith with environmental activism in more detail in the following chapter on emotions.

⁴³ <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2019-0106-judgment.pdf> dated 25 June 2021

XR Grandparents

On 15 October 2019, just after four thirty in the afternoon, outside Buckingham Palace in London XR grandparents was launched. Over a hundred grandparents, and some children, stood on the steps of the Queen Victoria Memorial, with the white marble reflecting the white and grey hair of the activists listening to speeches. Some addressed the Queen as a grandparent and aimed to unite grandparents to safeguard the planet for future generations. Of the seven activists I talked to in front of the black wrought iron gates of Buckingham Palace all of them mentioned their feelings of responsibility for the climate emergency, their regret that they had not taken action sooner, that they had a limited amount of time to protect their grandchildren's future and that action was now urgent. Later one of these activists was arrested for refusing to move.

XR grandparents adopted a more inclusive name of *XR Grandparents and Elders* in July 2020 and have continued to take actions both as a group and with those from other generations even during pandemic lockdowns. For example, they took action with XR Youth and XR Families on Earth Day on 22 April 2020. The change of name to include *Elders*, recognises that there are important familial generational relationships for those activists that are childless or child free and those who feel linked in some way to younger generations. Elders as a concept appeared to have a number of meanings. It was used simply to refer to these older generations but also to those leaders in communities or in religious movements with access to the enlightenment and wisdom that flows from immersion in, and experience of, culture and history. I explore this concept of eldership in more detail later in the chapter.

Inter-generational alliances and solidarity

This section explores how generations are a key dimension in this activist solidarity. It also documents how tensions are managed and how inter-generational friendships and solidarities developed unexpectedly often as a result of taking action together. The Autumn Rebellion started on 7 October 2019 with an attempt to take twelve sites in Central London. A key site for actions was Trafalgar Square, with its central location and historical use as a place of protest as well as a place of commemoration for a significant battle on an October day over two hundred years previously.

There by 9:00 o'clock. Started at the back of Nero's coffee shop in Trafalgar Square looking out of the window over Admiralty Arch. Lots of history from previous generations. Lots of waiting about and tension. Talked to B1 who is an arrestable in my affinity group the beekeepers. Sat outside for a while. She felt tense. Suddenly it all started. We blocked one entrance to Trafalgar Square with a trailer. The Driver was detained and arrested. Two lock-on's under the trailer and one on top. I videoed what happened. A scaffolding tower and a hearse blocked another two..... Spent almost the whole day supporting B1 locked on underneath the trailer. I notice that there are no pigeons anywhere... Someone asked me if I was her dad. Bloody cheek!.... B1 suddenly emerged after a long day and surprised the police. She could have run off. She was not actually detained. She looked drained. She was dying for a pee. It is always the practicalities of activism that stop actions! I realise that completely different generations have been taking actions today and that unexpected bonds and friendships have developed because "we are all in it together" (Field Diary 07.10.2019).

B1 was later arrested and taken to Lambeth police station. She was released four hours later at Midnight.

Hey everyone!! I'm back home, safe, and released under investigation (I've gotten off Scott free!). B7 is in the same boat, saw him outside the police station at midnight. Thank you all so much for your support today you lovely, lovely people!!! You're all the best and hope to see you on site again soon (B1 WhatsApp message to the Beekeepers affinity group 8 April 2019 01.14).

Some recent literature identifies the opportunities and the difficulties of solidarity developing across the generations in activism; 'the Picket provided opportunities for intergenerational interaction and friendship, as well as moments of incomprehension and miscommunication across the generations' (Brown and Yaffe, 2018, p.167). It also identifies how despite difference, activism allows different generations to engage as *equals*:

First the age difference between picketers at either end of the 'youth' category could be experienced (particularly by the youngest picketers) as dauntingly significant. Second, through propinquity on the picket and joint campaigning, the Non-Stop Picket provided an opportunity for many young picketers to engage with adults (other than their parents and teachers) as equals for the first time (Brown and Yaffe, 2018, p. 167).

When solidarity develops, it appears to benefit both the older and younger generations:

Although they learned much from older activists, this intergenerational exchange worked in both directions (albeit, not always without conflict and misunderstandings (Brown and Yaffe, 2018, p. 147).

Recently there has been a small body of research that has developed an understanding of generations through identity and difference. This approach examines how individuals identify themselves and others as members of a generation and how their perceptions of self and others are affected by this generational identity (Lyons and Kuron, 2013, p. 151). Gilliard draws upon Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *field* to propose a concept of generation that has 'a distinct, temporally located cultural *field* within which individuals from a potential variety of overlapping birth cohorts participate as generational agents' (Gilliard, 2004, p. 114).

Today the visibility of older environmental activists is increasing (Saunders, et al., 2020) and solidarity across the generations now appears to be an important aspect of environmental activism (Tranter, 2010; Szolucha, 2018). In addition, some activists self-identify as from a particular generational grouping. An example of this is an activist group, who call themselves the *Lancashire Nanas*, and protest against plans by Cuadrilla to extract shale gas in Fylde Lancashire.

If the two security guards had been awake, they probably wouldn't have believed their eyes. 25 women... in yellow tabards and matching Hilda Ogden headscarves, vaulting a gate in order to occupy the Blackpool field that the energy company Cuadrilla had paid the guards to mind. "We chose the nan image because we like what the Lancastrian matriarch stands for: rolling up her sleeves, getting things done, but still having time for a nice cup of tea," she said. "Also everyone listens to their nan don't they? If you're in trouble with your nan, you know you've gone too far".... Pam Foster, who is in her 60's, said the pro fracking campaigners tried to use their age against them. "At the start people would say: 'Oh you're too old. You're going to die soon. Leave the jobs for us.'" But the women were undeterred, spurred on by each other and history (Pidd, 2015).

Much of the literature about generational relations draws upon actual or potential conflicts and tensions between generations often due to the differences in power and

resources. Few explore intergenerational solidarity. Some try to identify specific generational cohorts and their identities. During the rebellions when taking actions in local XR groups and affinity groups I observed more older and younger generations with fewer of the middle aged. The reasons for this are not entirely clear.

The question of why some people participate in collective action, while most of them do not, have puzzled social movement scholars for decades, continuing to generate a burgeoning literature on what has been termed “differential recruitment”. Studies investigating protest participation however, rarely compare actual participants with non-participants (Van Laer, 2017, p. 311)

There is no evidence that the middle aged are less concerned about the climate emergency than any other age group or generation. Some literature suggests a *value-action* gap may explain why some people, whilst concerned about environmental issues are consequently not active. The gap being between concern about environmental issues and taking personal or collective action to address the climate emergency (Barr, 2006). Characteristics of those in middle age include that they are likely to work full time, unlike students and the retired, and are more likely to have caring responsibilities. It may be this combination that makes sustained activist protest both a less immediate priority and practically significantly more difficult for this generation. The reason why I suggest this combination rather than any one factor is that the majority of younger activists not in education, and a significant proportion of older activists were still in full time work. This is an area where further research is required in order to develop a better understanding of this phenomena of contemporary activism.

When thinking about the generational relationship between the young and the old, the role of organisations has been and continues to be important in mobilising activism and framing issues (Bertuzzi, 2019). There are youth led organisations, entirely youth-based organisations, adult dominated organisations and organisations that attract a wide range of activists across the generations. Some are local, some national and some international. XR has sought to be a *broad church*. An umbrella social movement that allows a wide range of identities to take action separately and together. It was noticeable how frequently activists of different generations become

active in the same space. I also noticed that important solidarities develop when generations meet in public space.

Waterloo bridge at 9:00 o'clock and followed the green brigade over the bridge the police escorted them over the length of the bridge. They move slowly and deliberately, one has a walking stick they seem to represent an older generation. As they pass through the black anti-terrorist blocks they bowed to the police officer, one by one thanking them. They cast long shadows against the morning sun, their hands outstretched by their sides, arms out stretched, palm's upwards. As they continued crossing the road and passed Parliament towards College Green they are watched by a group of uniformed school children on the opposite pavement. Three of them take pictures on their phones. Once they are passed the audience moves on (Field Diary 23 04 2019).

XR's climate activism have been a canvas for stitching intergenerational relationships between the old and the young together and shapes the activism, motivations and sense of urgency of activists. These generational aspects of XR's activism shape not only who is involved, but how they are involved, and what the activism looks like. It also shapes how activists define and place themselves in a particular generation and how they perceive other activists to be part of their generation or a member of another shapes their activism.

Four young women activists stand in the middle of Bank and hold a banner saying *we only want the earth* and singing 'in the city, the dirty city, the banks invest in oil'. Chanting "emergency...emergency...emergency...emergency", "climate justice now", "We want a future. Stop funding ecocide. Invest in our future", "why do we have to clean up your mess. Our future is going up in smoke" (Field diary 14.10.2019).

This field diary extract demonstrates a distinct and active youth climate activism fighting for its, if not a future. It highlights that it is the older generations that have caused the climate emergency and it is the younger generation who will have to deal with it or experience it. This research has identified that youth activist tactics are non-violent, often undertaking actions with less risk of arrest, recognising what they have to lose and demanding a different future. Older generations involved in XR often expressed their activism differently, as fighting for a future for their children or grandchildren, nephews or nieces. As B2 told me on Waterloo bridge

This won't really affect me, but I'm so worried about the world my grandchildren will have to live in if we don't do something right now (Field Diary 23 04 2019).

Protesting in masks I wonder if it'll catch on. Everyone is wearing them! I talked to a couple, one wearing a green shirt with a bee and conscientious protector on the front. Behind them I talk to another activist...looks like he is in his 70's... he says "This is an emergency and needs to be treated as one. Our generation produced all this CO₂ and we need to stop it now (Field Diary 01.09.2019).

Older activists often cited that a primary motivation for their activism was to protect their and other families' children. This motivation informed the risks they were prepared to take, the consequences they were prepared to accept, the tactics that they used and the urgency with which they demanded the problem be defined and addressed.

This study also identified how intergenerational solidarity is built by, noticeably different generations, taking actions together, looking out for each other and living the resulting experiences together. This intergenerational solidarity was noticed and discussed by activists. For example, the Hackney XR Autumn Rebellion debrief noted: 'Young and old getting stuck in, helping each other out'. So, the generational aspects of this contemporary activism shapes not only who is involved, but how they are involved and what the activism looks like. The creative actions they undertook together produced activism that had different impacts than when the young or the old took action separately. Younger activists talked about potential, opportunities, and different future imaginaries. Older activists often identified the importance of eldership. By that I mean the extent to which current activists recognise that they stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before and explicitly or implicitly refer to those people, a body of knowledge, or traditions in their activism. Older activists mentioned that they have less to lose than younger activists. They wanted to contribute what they valued and their life experiences. They offered their resilience to the movement despite *generational pessimism*⁴⁴ and some loss of trust through

⁴⁴ A feeling that you have tried to take action and achieve change many times before but been unsuccessful.

repeated disappointment. Those older activists feeling shame for the actions of older generations responded to the sense of blame of younger activists towards older generations. I analyse the concepts of eldership in more detail later in this chapter.

XR has facilitated the development of internal groups so that activists with specific identities can come together to take action. On 14 June 2019 there were sixty-two active non geographical *community* groups posted on the XR website (Field Diary 14.06.2019). These groups included XR Farmers, XR Education, XR Guerrilla gardening and XR Art blockers but also those which reflect the generations such as XR Youth, XR Grandparents and Elders or XR Families. My research has identified that many activists describe their activism in relation to their generation and other generations.

Daze Aghaji, another XR Youth member, said: “as an older person, you're doing it for your next generation - but we're actually doing it for ourselves” (Murray, 2019).

In addition, rather than this creating tensions and conflicts, sometimes the difference was recognised and created a solidarity between the generations which made the activism more impactful. However there have been tensions. These tensions tend to coalesce around how involved different generations are in decision making and the value and risk of taking specific actions. For example, XR Youth had fundamental concerns about the risk and value of an action that involved flying drones at Heathrow airport to disrupt air travel.

The Heathrow drones were incredibly divisive.... The promoters of the idea responded by curtailing the action; the drones would be flown in the exclusion zone, up to head height and a safe distance from the runways. The compromise did not satisfy the internal critics, including XR Youth. Talia Woodin recalls: “We crashed a strategy meeting, that we hadn't been invited to because those that were wanting to push forward with the actions knew that we were opposing it. We gave an ultimatum and said if this action went ahead we would condemn it”. This action tipped the balance in the meeting; the result was another compromise. The supporters would create a new group, Heathrow Pause, to carry out the action (Melia, 2021, p. 184).

The development of collective identity

As examined in chapter one, social movement studies analyse how people come together, become political and challenge the dominant and powerful. Doherty (2006) identified four characteristics of new social movements. The development of a *common identity*, the use of *network ties* to take action or exchange ideas, *public protest* and a challenge to some feature of a *dominant paradigm*. Whilst not laying claim to XR being a new social movement, these four characteristics are identifiable in its strategy, tactics and operations. Chapter one also examined two distinct approaches to explaining the development of social movements. The first stresses the rationality of activists in responding either to some sort of deprivation or developing opportunity. The second is the importance of networks and the development of a collective identity which then has expression in solidarity. Collective identity being the norms, beliefs, symbols, and stories which produce solidarity which in turn motivates and maintains collective action.

What my research has identified is that in XR activism, which attempts to bring together activists across difference, the conventional understanding of these two approaches are helpful in exposing how and why solidarity across generations may develop, but are not sufficient. Key components of this identity flow from the everyday messiness and emotions, feelings and affect of taking action together as well as chance or serendipity. XR activists clearly recognise the importance of the development of collective identity and organisational solidarity. There are varied norms and beliefs amongst activists and much of XR's communications strategy and training is to identify and promote collective symbols, identities and stories both inside and outside the organisation. This communications strategy was examined in more detail in chapter three. So, this research does support an approach that understands the importance of the development of collective identity but that this collective identity can be intergenerational and is therefore more complex than sometimes suggested. This research identifies that collective intergenerational identity is always being built, evolves over time and is powerful.

Social media and generations

Social media is now central to understandings of generational interactions and activism (Pink, 2012; Velasquez and LaRose, 2015; Garvey and Miller, 2021). Every

one of the meetings or actions that I have been involved in as an XR activist would either not have been possible or markedly different without the use of social media. From coordinating actions, to organising blockade rotas, to updating on activities at each site of protest or 'dropping a pin' to show where to meet up.

WhatsApp chat from Beekeepers today. "We've been pencilled in for a shift from 10:00 PM to 1:00 AM also. Tonight? That's a weird time isn't it? Yeah shifts have been split up a bit". B5 just posted a picture of some cakes she's made. "I prepared a little something. Who's hungry? I'm on my way to Marble Arch.... Can we meet up at Margaret Street, West side...I've just dropped a pin....They're getting more indiscriminate with arrest so look after yourselves....still have all the food should come by the well-being tent... see you there I'm going to be there in 15 minutes doing some songs and games in the family area this morning. Would be lovely to see you come and sing with us. Is the boat in Oxford Circus down? Yeah the boat is dead, had a great sign off. RIP OC!" (Field Diary 19.04.2019).

Every activist that I have met, or taken action with, has had a smartphone that they used in their activism whatever generation that they may identify with. The use of smartphones and social media, both in everyday life and this activism, shapes the connectivity between friends, acquaintances, and the wider world. It facilitates the development of discrete groups that allows the separation, or joining, of different aspects of people's lives and the sharing of ideas, information and emotion. XR activists use smartphones and social media as part of their activism. My research has identified that these technologies help intergenerational solidarity develop by using common platforms and the real time sharing of practical interventions and shared emotional responses.

Christian climate action tweeted about developing intergenerational solidarity today. "I really enjoyed coming today especially meeting Sue. This inspiring young man joined us at a recent climate protest with his parents. We think you and Sue are both pretty wonderful and it's so moving seeing generations coming together to protect our planet" (Field Diary 16.05 2020).

This contemporary environmental activism, with youth and older people taking action together, increases XR's solidarity creating bonds due to their generations' vulnerability and responsibility for the climate emergency, with the emotions this generates in both activists and audiences making the action significantly more

impactful. Using smartphones shapes these interactions and activist smartphone doings capture the shape of this intergenerational solidarity and make them manifest and visible. It demonstrates that this solidarity develops when each generation explains their contribution to the climate emergency by telling their truth about climate change and demanding urgent action.

XR activists use creative actions to draw upon generational experiences highlighting our past and our potential futures and using emotions to create clear resonant messages. For example, by reinforcing the message that *change is now*.⁴⁵ XR activists have acted as a nexus for the development of generational solidarity. In both my affinity group and local group solidarity developed from senses of responsibility, senses of guilt and the generating and sharing of emotions between the generations. Noticing the development of generational solidarity is crucial to understanding this XR activism.

Generations and lifecourse

This section examines how generations inform and shape activist identity, often involving storytelling about life course and transformative moments. Lifecourse studies often emphasise sudden transitions in people's lives with concepts such as *nuclear episode* (McAdam, 1986), *epiphany* (Denzin, 2001) or *transformative moments* (Hards, 2012). There has been little research using the concepts of *lifecourse* or *sudden transitions* in geographical studies in general, and research into environmental activism in particular (Hopkins and Pain, 2007; Hards, 2012). However, those studies that have used these concepts have gained important insights.

Pickers of all ages benefited from interactions across generational boundaries, but those people who (like the teenage activists) were also experiencing a significant life-course transition were often those who enjoyed the social life of the Picket, the mutual support it offered for those finding their way through the new challenges life threw at them, and remember those years as a particularly intense period in their personal (not just political) lives (Brown and Yaffe, 2018, p. 170).

⁴⁵ A common message in the October 2019 rebellion. Here highlighted by The Red Rebel Brigade <https://youtu.be/qH-bYt3Ti1w>.

Hopkins and Pain argue that ‘the three concepts of intergenerationality, intersectionality and life-course undermine the narrow focus of geographers to date on the very young and the very old and provide a framework for thinking about age relationally’ (Hopkins and Pain, 2007, p. 291). In addition, that ‘although some human geographers have also contributed to’ the understanding of intersectionality ‘much work still has to be done with regard to the intersection of particular age, generational and other identities and their spatial specificity’ (Hopkins and Pain, 2007, 290).

XR activist training, such as the DNA training I attended on 18 January 2020, foregrounds the importance of storytelling and lifecourse. Both the personal and the organisational. Its purpose is not only to unite a decentralised movement but to have a recognisable identity both for the individual and the organisation. These stories build lifecourse narratives and history. They surface identities; what we are concerned about; the choices we can make; who we are and what our vision and hopes are for the future. At this training the story we developed collectively for XR was about telling the truth; stopping ecological destruction and the climate emergency; choosing to do something rather than nothing; that XR activists were ordinary and not exceptional people and have a vision of communities working together to create climate justice. The training focused not just on developing the story of the organisation but encouraged activists to think about their own life story and how they could use it to further their activism. So, each activist story is intended to give a deeper and shared understanding of how as an activist one is part of a movement; how one can work within a strategy and a structure and then using those personal and organisational stories reach out to others to encourage involvement, or at least support, to tackle the climate emergency.

My research demonstrates that activists often tell a story of their life course and can identify key events or points in time that led them to take action and can describe those activities and experiences which have sustained that activism. The concept of lifecourse proposes that the present circumstances of people can be better understood in the context of the pattern of their previous life experiences. This concept is most useful in understanding older generations, in which there will be more context to place current events and experiences. The lifecourse perspective

stresses the linkages between phases in people's lives, rather than examining each phase in isolation (Arber and Evandrou, 1999). However, there are only a few studies that explore the interactions between generations and people's lifecourses (Putney and Bengtson, 2005).

It is interesting that most XR activists in my research can locate themselves somewhere in one of the five generational cohorts set out in Figure 13. However, predominantly activists identified as younger or older activists and describe the responsibility and the relationship that they and their cohort have to the anthropogenic climate emergency. My research shows how activists have complex and overlapping identities. For example, when I asked S8, who she was she said:

“...well... I suppose I am lots of things. I am a project manager, young, a woman, a vegan, British, a Londoner.... all in all a millennial...would you say you were a boomer?” (Field Diary 07.04 2019).

Many activists were keen to tell their activist story. Their story would often identify transformative moments that led to them becoming and or remaining active. Some describe being on a journey. Although activist identities were complex the generational component was often key to understanding their activist identity.

Eight to four o'clock shift for the beekeepers at the Strand Trafalgar Square blockade. Talk to an artist who later arrived as a steward at the blockade speeches. He wants to tell me how it is that he came to stand here today. He says it is a journey. We fortify the blockade with a thin white tape and two traffic lights at high level. B5 chalks a beautiful green tree with roots and leaves on the road. It must be 20 foot high. She says that she and her boyfriend joined XR together they both felt they now needed to do something. S2 says he feels 'upbeat' and 'happy in spirit' and that this is important and worthwhile and the world may be listening. It seems important being together..but doing nothing together. The old and the young. The police arrive. They destroy the camp and the blockade. The territorial support group storm into the square. They push me aside. The contrast between the calm quiet protest a few moments previously and the sudden shouting and aggression assaults my senses. I feel sad and angry. I think of the police commander on the radio this morning saying proudly how many more people they had arrested in this rebellion and how more aggressively they were policing. I feel confused. While others on Signal message about rushing to the scene..... When the mayhem subsides a bit, B5 mentions her

age for some reason.... When I review my video it captures the mindless destruction. The blockade is gone. I feel changed somehow (Field Diary 09.10. 2019).

Generations, nature and the environment

The nature of climate change and environmental concerns, in which current human activities result in future but often uncertain impacts sometimes decades later, engages generations as a powerful driver in mobilising activists. During this research I noticed how generations and temporality intersect, not with gender, class or race, but with nature and the profound changes that humans have made to the planet. Activists' understandings of nature, and its entanglement with generations and temporality give different but important insights. In chapter one I examined important current environmental debates and perspectives and the profound and complex impacts of humans on the environment. These include the anthropocene and changing planetary boundaries, dimensions of nature and how it can be understood (such as socio-nature ecocentrism and wildlife as well as environmental justice and citizenship). Cultural theory, that proposes four different types of people⁴⁶ (Fatalist, Hierarchist, Individualist, and Egalitarian) with different views or 'myths' of nature, seeks to describe and explain why different individuals respond differently to environmental problems (Steg and Sievers, 2000). I also identified the concepts of just sustainabilities and just transitions.

Anderson (2009) draws our attention to the relational connections humans have with the world, in which the places of nature must be felt to make sense. Anderson (2015) identifies that when engaging with our relational sensibilities to socio-nature the constitutive co-ingredients of people and place can 'move' us and prompt re-evaluations of relationships and how we should act in the place of nature.

The coming together of nonhuman, human, embodied practice, and place results in an emotional experience that is both the product of this convergence, and itself becomes part of the broader, relational constitution. A relational sensibility thus contributes to a knowledge that is both embodied

⁴⁶ The fatalist myth conceives nature as capricious. In which needs nor resources are controllable, with a premium on ignorance. The Hierarchist myth sees nature as perverse and tolerant, with acceptable risks determined by experts and nature in an unstable equilibrium. The individualistic myth views nature as stable and with a global equilibrium, being full of abundant resources. The egalitarian myth sees nature as ephemeral in precarious balance with resources rapidly depleting.

and cognitive, producing an understanding that identifies relational independence and Co constitution in the natural world (Anderson, 2009, p. 124)

This section examines the intersection between generations, environmental activists, nature and environmental justice. XR activists of different generations link the environment and nature to their activism. They often identified themselves as part of the earth, the planet or nature. Sometimes using these terms interchangeably.

Action outside of the Bank of England today. If the environment was a bank, it would have been saved already is the first chant I hear. The growing crowd is all overseen by a mobile camera on top of a plain looking blue Transit van. Red London Buses are stacked in lines in the side roads. An ambulance comes through the crowd with blue lights and the crowd parts. Lots of young people here today singing “power to the people... people got the power... getting stronger by the hour.. blocking the roads to save nature and our future (Field notes 14 October 2019).

During the autumn 2019 rebellion XR Families standing behind a pink banner drop with the message ‘Extinction **or** Rebellion’ sang about parenthood, their children and nature in the Mall.

“They paved paradise and put up a parking lot. With a pink hotel, a boutique and a swinging hot spot. Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got till it's gone. They paved paradise and put up a parking lot. They took all the trees and put 'em in a tree museum and they charged the people a dollar and a half just to see 'em” (Field diary 08.10.2019 11.49).

In being part of nature they were both responsible for the changes that have taken place to cause the climate emergency as well as affected by those changes. They protested and justified that protest with this intertwined proximity of the *Human* and *Nature*. *We are nature defending itself* was a common feature of activist placards and chants. They noticed and accepted substantial human impact on our planet today having entered the new epoch of the Anthropocene. They talked about environmental and climate justice and saw their generational position intertwined with their personal understanding of it. They mentioned tipping points and environmental boundaries in relation to the past, the present and future imaginaries and mirrored the ephemeral conception of the myth of nature across the generations.

No pride on a dead planet banner between the traffic lights at Marsam Street junction with Horseferry Road. Ongoing arrests. There's a rhythm to them, there's almost a rhythm to them like the waves in sea. Which makes me think about nature and the environment as the arrests take place. There is a group of older activists with painted bees on sticks outside the Home Office. Further on, outside the Department for Food, the Environment and Rural Affairs, XR Youth have *Factory farming is a dead loss* placards and *Our future is going up in smoke*. Funny how *The environment* is linked by the state to *Rural affairs*. XR Families have an *Everything will change* banner and *I speak for the trees as the trees have no tongues signed Uncooperative crusties* (Field Diary 08.10.2019).

Members of my affinity group identified a relationship between care, and lack of care, for the environment and care and lack of care for people. Other local XR groups talked about the importance of climate and environmental justice, often developing a fourth demand of the government in the area of justice. They had different generational understandings of climate change, in part because older activists could talk from memories of a different climate or a different nature. Different stories about how old activists were when they realised human impacts on nature, the environment and a developing climate emergency. Different generations had different understandings of climate change due to when they noticed climate change and biodiversity loss as a discourse in their generation. There were different perspectives on the current environmental problems which led to different understandings of the nature and causes of those problems, the range of potential solutions and what actions individuals or groups might become engaged in as a response. Since 2019 XR activists have increasingly been working on *Being the change*, both individually and collectively.

There are four clear narratives about nature that I noticed and saw repeated regularly in XR activist communications and discourses since 2019. The first is how nature is understood differently in majority and minority world countries and the importance of generational understandings of nature in indigenous communities. Secondly about the importance of biodiversity, how that diversity is being lost and how it will impact on future generations. Thirdly a concept of historic nature, contextualising human impacts on the planet as setting in motion a sixth mass

extinction and lastly a call to positive visioning to connect with and nurture nature. I now examine each one of these four narratives in more detail.

Firstly, as I outlined in chapter one, nature can be understood very differently. XR activists drew attention to understandings of nature at an intersection of generations and this is spatially and culturally influenced and determined.

Across the globe, grandmothers and grandfathers of indigenous peoples can tell us similar stories. They are living witnesses of climate change. The grandmother of my sister Jannie, from the Sami people of the Arctic, can describe precisely the disappearance of ice and snow. The grandfather of my brother Cerda, from the Quechua people of Amazonia can tell how the rainforest was once infinite, and how it's disappearing because of deforestation (Ibrahim, 2019, p. 54).

Some XR activists sought to build connections and togetherness, reconceptualising local struggles in the minority world by supporting a struggle of a threatened indigenous community in the majority world and positioning their struggles adjacently. They sought to incorporate indigenous understandings of nature: 'Because nature is our life. Because nature is our identity' (Ibrahim, 2019, p. 55): with their own. Indigenous Australian conceptions such as *country* help illuminate this entanglement.

These differences are reflected not only by the rejection of the use of 'wilderness' but by the active use of the word 'country'. Country is viewed as an intertwining of kinship, ancestry and responsibility (Pickerill, 2008).

Secondly, nature and the survival of future generations of humans and more than humans. XR's original wording of their first demand was to *tell the truth about climate change and biodiversity loss*. They frame the ecological problem facing the planet as about two equally critical issues; biodiversity loss; and rapid and damaging climate change (Rebellion, 2022). They assert that we face the loss of over a million species due to human activities occurring at a rate of 27,000 species a year, or one every nineteen minutes. This biodiversity loss impacts food systems, economic systems and overall resilience in the face of increasing extreme weather events. They frame nature's importance as its diversity and its importance to the continued survival of the human race. They call upon people from all walks of life, different backgrounds,

cultures, political affiliations and generations to come together to create a better future. Generationally they identify the young and the vulnerable across the planet as most impacted by this biodiversity loss.

The third conceptualisation of nature is that humans are rapidly changing the earth and the composition of the atmosphere inevitably leading to a mass extinction of most living things including ourselves. They contextualise this in relation to five previous mass extinction events which have occurred during the last five hundred million years. Each one of these extinction events had specific causes, such as low carbon dioxide levels and resulting glaciation or an asteroid crashing into the Yucatan Peninsula creating a dust cloud and a winter of prolonged cooling. They estimate that these events resulted in up to a ninety-six percent of species being lost. They identify an anthropogenic sixth mass extinction as an extinction of nature and currently underway.

The last conception of nature is that of a call to positive visioning to connect with and nurture nature. It gained expression in the Easter 2019 rebellion on Waterloo Bridge, when it was renamed the garden bridge, with hundreds of small trees and plants, connecting nature with this ephemeral conscious community of Extinction Rebellion activists. This conception is also present in the description of XR Hackney's guerrilla garden described in the May 2020 XR London newsletter.

The garden of earthly delights is currently celebrating its first anniversary. Not only has this created a green haven and a joyful environment to interact with the local community, it has provided a learning space for topics such as system change and permaculture...in a creative re-imagining of urban areas by encouraging and protecting nature and wildlife (XR London Newsdesk, Newsletter 27).

This conception of nature also seeks to link the regenerative culture in XR as part of the regenerative action cycle. After taking action and celebrating and sharing stories this takes the form of connecting to nature in order to integrate and dream.

Through our creativity, adaptability and resilience we are all engaged in the mission of raising the alarm and remembering what it truly means to be

humans as part of nature and that we are a part of the Earth (Rebellion, 2019).

The relational sensibility between activist and nature is an important motivator for action across the generations, although understood and expressed in different ways.

Elders and Eldership

In most communities there are elders, very often towards the end of their lives, who have had thoughts and advice passed on to them from previous generations. They have been able to reflect upon and evaluate that advice, had the possibility of a wide range of experiences themselves, making mistakes and as a result obtaining some wisdom through these life experiences again with the potential to share and pass on this learning to younger generations. Sometimes this gives elders power over other generations, but often elders are revered because of their life experience and the wisdom they can share as a result. The concept of eldership is linked to that of stewardship in which previous generations have passed other more tangible things on to us: Institutions, culture, traditions, laws and landmarks but probably most importantly potentials. Stewardship is about how things are inherited, what is passed on and how it is passed on for future generations. That which is inherited from past generations gives future generations potential to build upon.

XR Grandparents and Christian Climate Action were noisy and noticeable as we gathered at Buckingham Palace. Before we set off to Parliament Square there was a small group of young people gathered around Rowen Williams talking to him about taking action on climate. His grey beard and hair made him stand out. They listened intently as he spoke about what he had learned and how he now needed now to bear witness about the climate emergency. He was not only sharing his thoughts and his personal calling to take action, but it was almost as if was giving them permission to be active.....We were there for over an hour and more activists assembled in groups as time passed...Activism sometime seems to involve a lot of hanging about!...one member of XR grandparents was in a larger group sharing stories of other activisms she had been involved in. It was as if she was imparting some distilled wisdom of previous protests and showing the scars she bore as a result, despite the mask she was wearing! (Field Diary 01.09.2020).

When older and younger activists were together in the same place, particularly at times when there was a lull in the action, often before actions started or during the

long periods of protest, I noticed that older activists and younger activists would often explore those older activists' experiences, lifecourses and understandings of previous activisms. Although some of these older activists were in leadership positions within XR, most were not, but they still influenced how activism was expressed by others. The concepts of eldership and stewardship are important for at least two reasons in considering the activism/generation entanglement in these XR activisms. Firstly, it shaped activist discourse on what planet and nature would be passed onto future generations and the potentiality for those future generations. Secondly, as highlighted in chapter three, environmental activisms have a history of building on elders' activism with this eldership used, changed and developed. This understanding of the role of elders, eldership and stewardship is an important aspect of the dynamics of these XR activisms.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have again explored how radical activism relates to the police, the courts, the state and the law. XR activists use the courts as part of their activism and protest not least because it is an opportunity to make a claim that, as they come before a court for allegedly breaking the law, higher laws are being broken leading to a climate emergency. Activists who are tried in Crown Courts before a judge and jury are sometimes acquitted, either because of a human right to protest, or because despite advice from the judge, a jury is not prepared to convict. In the concluding chapter I return to the complicated relations between activists, the police, the state and the law and consider in more detail how effective the state was in responding to radical activism and its actions during 2019 and 2020 and what the implications of this may be.

What is clear from this research is that this contemporary environmental activism is a multi-generational and intergenerational endeavour. It highlights how geography rarely examines the interconnectedness of generations. In society power relations between different generations can be fluid. For example, young people caring for parents or older relatives shifts power relations between age groups. When examining the power relations between different generations in this activism we notice that they are fluid and related to the type and nature of actions undertaken

and which generations take risks to promote their activism. This research demonstrates that in this XR activism when generational positions are paid attention to and examined, additional insights such as how intergenerational solidarity develops and what it does are exposed. It identifies the importance of intergenerational conversations which can overcome difference across those generations but also that employing eldership can make activism more impactful. The research identifies that when different generations take action together an intergenerational identity develops in which solidarity can grow and that this collective intergenerational identity is always being built, evolves and is powerful.

The research identifies that this intergenerational activism can increase the impact of activism in at least three ways. It allows activists to tell and develop powerful narratives separately to communicate why the climate emergency needs to be addressed urgently. Secondly, the young and old taking action together promotes and assists XR's messaging of urgency, time, extinction and responsibility by engaging different voices to give these messages added authenticity, which strengthens both of their claims. Older activists can talk with knowledge, experience and responsibility about the past and younger activists about the future with different knowledge, experience and responsibility for the climate emergency. Lastly, activists can develop a sense of eldership in their activism which gives permission for older activists to make a contribution to shaping intergenerational activism and younger activists the potential to accept, value and build upon historical activism. So, noticing this activist generational perspective allows different understandings of XR activism as a whole with intergenerational activism added to the activist repertoire and tactics. These XR activism identify the importance of generations in the understanding of activism and demonstrate the power of embracing generations productively.

Chapter 6

Emotion

Easter day. Real contrast between mostly calm and smiling police and some who have a very angry and menacing demeanour but there is a feeling of hope that is becoming more powerful in the activists I meet. I noticed hope in the faces of some of those arrested at the Oxford Street blockade, the group in the communal tent at the protest camp had a citizens assembly talking about hope and this hope making them feel more committed to demand change (Field Diary 21.04.2019).



Figure 14: Rebel for love banner (Source author).

This chapter examines how XR activists have consciously and unconsciously generated affect, feelings and emotion and the impact that this has had on individual activists, the wider social movement, and the public. It examines how feelings, emotions and affect are generated and what they do. Although it broadly locates these concepts, it does not seek to answer the question *what precisely are affects, feelings and emotions?*, either individually or collectively, but examines what they do by tracking how emotions circulate between bodies and examining how they *stick* as well as *move* (Ahmed, 2014). Firstly, I make my positionality clear in a personal story. Then I explore affect, feelings and emotions in activists' appeals to grief, hope, love, pride and vulnerability. I explain how other emotions such as fear and anger are entwined with these emotions and how they are better understood in this entanglement. I then examine how these emotions, feelings and affect are generated, and what they do, in performing arts, use of and appeals to faith, and in actions that are inconveniencing or disruptive.

There is a wide range of literature on the importance of emotion in driving people to take action (Jasper, 1998; Brown and Pickerill, 2009). Some that examines how scholars have used either the rational or emotion as the key driver to explain why people are mobilised to take political action (Goodwin, et al., 2000). Although there is some literature that theorises about the thinking/feeling dualism (Jasper, 2018), there is less that examines the specific feelings, emotions and affect that are consciously and unconsciously generated by activists and the impact that it has (Henderson, 2008; Kleres and Asa, 2017).

In addition, this chapter examines the complexity of the entanglement of emotion and the rational, whilst recognising that both the rational and emotion are socially constructed concepts. XR by recognising that there is not a feeling/thinking dualism, but that they are intertwined, have designed their strategy and tactics to appeal to both together. The central strategy of XR demands that governments *Tell the truth* about the climate and ecological emergency, whilst calling on governments, organisations, individuals and activists to *Act now*. Telling the truth assumes that there is one rational truth with an appeal to the rational in *the science is clear*, whilst a call to arms to deal with an emergency and to act now, is an appeal to the emotions.

I argue that:

- Affects, feelings and emotions generated in and by different dimensions of activism give different understandings of those aspects of activism. There are greater insights by noticing what affects, feelings and emotions are present and what they do in different activist strategies, tactics, actions and practices. For example, emotions in movement building and solidarity do different things to those emotions engaged in sustainability and impact.
- XR activisms are more purposeful in using emotions, feelings and affect in its activisms than previous environmental activisms. By focusing on generating and responding to grief, hope, love and pride in conjunction with vulnerability XR activisms have enhanced their impact.
- Emotions in activisms can be powerful but they are contextual and suggesting that some emotions are intrinsically better at motivating certain actions rather than others is not borne out in this research. The

relationship within and between emotions, feelings and affect are overlapping and messy.

- Generating specific emotions sometimes leads to surprising outcomes that cannot be contained even when a regenerative culture is employed as an emotional methodology.

A personal story

Feelings and emotions are funny things. Sometimes you try to suppress them to avoid their consequences. Sometimes you seek them out in order to be more alive. Sometimes you use them in order to demonstrate empathy with others, or persuade people to take action, or 'come along for the ride' as it were. Until recently I've not been able to put a name to those deep sensations, in and between me and others that are definitely there, but difficult to get hold of, grasp and describe. So, I understand how and why *affect* is a slippery thing (I thought of using the word concept here, but that makes affect seem elsewhere, and theoretical whereas *thing* sums up its tangibility, its realness and connectivity with bodies and place) which scholars therefore understand and describe differently. My parents met at Erith Baptist Church when they were both thirteen, which is where they got married. With Christian parents, the whole family went to church every Sunday and as a child I saw how members of the congregation made sacrifices for their beliefs. Sometimes with huge personal consequences. I saw the affect of religious experience. As a child I understood love as a complex emotion that drove people to do things for a wider purpose or because of a personal connection with individuals and groups; but sometimes for people they would never meet. How people hoped for a better future and the impact that this had. I was bullied a bit at school which taught me to bury feelings and emotions. To allow a numbness. To other what were painful, belittling and distancing feelings. Burying feelings and emotions in this way was a good coping strategy for me but it was never completely successful, and I would notice that these feelings and emotions bubbled up in unexpected ways and in unexpected places. When I was nineteen my dad died suddenly. I had heard him pottering in the garden, which was one of his pleasures, for most of what was a warm summer's day. In the late afternoon I discovered him lifeless on the settee in the front room. I tried to resuscitate him. I called, and waited for an ambulance, which seemed to never come. Eventually the GP came. The undertakers arrived and they asked me to take

his wedding ring off his finger before they took him away. I know what grief feels like. It makes you question what is important. Sometimes you wake up having forgotten the grief and pain and then it washes back into you again like the tide coming in. Sometimes lapping and sometimes crashing. It makes you angry, vulnerable, and sometimes when you feel happy the guilt arrives. However, grief allowed me to understand what was important, allowed a clarity of thought and purpose to develop and connected me with others in powerful and unexpected ways. Grief, guilt, anger, happiness, and vulnerability, like many emotions, are personal, can be collective, and are embodied and complex. My emotions do not have a mind/ body dualism they are all encompassing.

The first political action I was involved in was at The University of Leeds when we occupied the admin building to protest about cuts to education. I can remember how energising it was. Being part of the occupation was exciting, fun and scary. During my NHS career, when I was The Director of Service Transformation at Northeast London Health Authority, I was fortunate with other NHS leaders to be part of a yearlong, Leading Modernisation Programme. I learnt how important authenticity was for good leadership. I aspired to be what Debra Meyerson (Meyerson, 2003) called, a *Tempered Radical*. That is someone who wants to succeed in an organisation, but is determined to live by their values, identities and emotions even if they are somehow at odds with the dominant culture. 'They want to rock the boat, and they want to stay in it' (Meyerson, 2003, p. xi). I have seen how people hide feelings and emotions, but that it is often the authentic self, with an invitation to bring yourself, that motivates people to join, get involved and seek change.

So, understanding feelings, emotions and affect is always a journey without an end. Important components and underpinnings of our world are difficult to understand and are understood differently. For example, I am not personally able to comprehend infinity. A universe with no end that goes on forever and has no boundaries is difficult for me to conceptualise, when I live in a world with boundaries everywhere. That is why understanding that these concepts of emotions, feelings and affect are difficult to understand completely, theorise or operationalise does not make them any less important.

Affect, feelings, and emotion

Pile (2010) examines how emotions and affect have been employed by scholars in human geography. He identifies that emotional geography emphasises and privileges the importance of expressed emotions whilst affectual geography, using non-representational theories, emphasises the importance of inexpressible affects. Non-representational theory, originally proposed by Thrift (2007), seeks to emphasise process, embodiment, materiality and practice. However, Thrift accepts that affect can mean lots of different things and as he says 'the problem that must be faced straight away is there is no stable definition of affect' (2004, p. 59). Jasper calls affect a 'mysterious force' (2018, p. x). Whilst Marston describes affect as 'a diverse slippery concept with no unitary genealogical history in the social sciences' (2020, p. 605). However, she does identify two dominant trends in scholarly thought about affect. Firstly, where affects are hard wired *within* the body, being identifiable physiological reactions such as disgust, joy, interest, anger, shame, fear or surprise, but with no causal connection between a particular encounter and the affect it evokes. Secondly, where affect is *between* bodies and pre personal in which it circulates amongst and between bodies and is an intensive change of state that registers as embodiment, but before it can be understood or comprehended.

Thrift (2004) invites us to consider four different approaches to the translation of affect. The first conceives of affect as a set of embodied practices that produce visible conduct. The second translation posits that emotions are primarily vehicles or manifestations of the underlying drives or desires. The third translation defines affect as the property of the active outcome of an encounter which increases or decreases the ability of bodies and minds to act. The fourth translation of affect is that emotions are not necessarily unique to human beings with other animals having some of the same emotions and expressions, which introduces the possibility of non-human bodies shaping affect. With these translations one can see that Thrift sometimes uses affect and emotion somewhat interchangeably.

Jasper proposes that feelings are 'mostly ways of processing information, orienting ourselves to the world, signalling to others, and preparing ourselves for purposive action' (2018, p. xi). He argues that it is not possible to separate feelings from thinking, that it is one process and that contrasting feelings with thinking obscures

this one process. He uses the concept of emotions as recognised, bundles of feelings that can be described and labelled.

Emotions, unlike affect, are widely understood in the everyday world. They can be dramatic and all consuming, or faint, subtle and not immediately obvious. However, the everyday discourse and language of emotion is based upon a presumption that they are internalised. Ahmed (2014) evaluates this *inside out* model of emotions in which someone has feelings which then move outwards towards objects and others and may then well return to that person. She then considers an *outside in* model in which emotions are assumed to come from without and move inward drawing attention to the social and the individual. However, she concludes that:

Emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects... emotions create the very surfaces and boundaries that allow all kinds of objects to be delineated. The objects of emotion take shape as effects of circulation... emotions circulate (Ahmed, 2014, p. 10).

Emotions have a spatial and connective quality. Emotions are 'a relational, connective medium' (Bondi, 2005, p. 433) 'they arise and flow between people, producing as much as manifesting what may be felt to belong to one person or another' (Bondi, 2005, p. 443). It is this understanding of emotions as having spatial, connective and circulating qualities that I have drawn upon in my research.

Emotions are closely tied or inseparable from bodily sensations and naming and understanding emotions is both a social and cultural process (Brown and Pickerill, 2009; Ahmed, 2014). Because feelings and emotions are many, complex in our understanding and overlapping Jasper suggests 'a middle path between treating dozens or hundreds of emotions separately and, on the other hand, seeking statements that apply to all of them' (2018, p. xi). He therefore suggests a classification of five groupings of emotions to focus scholars' analysis. Firstly, *reflex emotions* such as anger, fear, surprise and joy which are often automatic responses to events. Secondly, *urges* which are urgent bodily needs such as hunger, exhaustion or pain which crowd out other feelings. Thirdly, *moods* which can be

energising or de-energising, but persist across different settings. Fourthly, *affective commitments* which are relatively stable feelings, positive or negative, such as love and hate, trust or mistrust. Lastly, *moral emotions*, being feelings of approval or disapproval, based on moral intuitions or principles, such as shame, guilt, pride, rage and compassion.

Pile (2010) draws on Anderson's (2006) conceptual model to describe the relationship between affect, feeling and emotion identifying three layers of entanglement between the mind and body. Firstly, the affects are non-cognitive. They are the deepest layer below, behind and beyond both precognition and cognition and they never become psychological objects. Affects reside in bodies and refer to flows between bodies. Bodies being 'people and things' and affect is the intensities 'that are less fully formed than nameable or specific emotions' (Boyd and Harada, 2021, p. 2). Secondly, feelings which are precognitive lie between affects and emotion, but they are not expressed or nameable remaining tacit and intuitive but can emerge into consciousness. Feelings are personal and are a response to transpersonal affects and therefore cannot be said then to be contiguous with the individual even while they are personally experienced. Thirdly, emotions are cognitively expressed feelings, both being conscious and experienced. Although emotions emerge from feelings and represent personal experience they are socially constructed, through language and other representational practices.

Affect, feeling and emotion in activism

In using these contested concepts, I have relied mainly on Anderson's relational conception of affect, feelings and emotions as described above with two important caveats. Firstly, I understand *bodies* not just to be human. Secondly, (unlike Thrift, who wishes to set aside approaches that tend to work with a notion of individualised emotions, preferring to stick with approaches that work with the notion of broad tendencies and lines of force) I see value in my research in seeking to identify and locate specific and groups of emotions, whilst recognising that they overlap, merge and are complex and socially constructed. In summary, in using these concepts my interpretation is that affect is an experience that may be intense but is nonconscious, feelings are deep seated and often more difficult to recognise and describe, whilst emotions circulate, have outward expressions which are often recognised by other

bodies which can powerfully affect others' actions. Therefore, twenty years after Anderson's and Smith's challenge to use emotions as ways of knowing, being and doing and therefore thinking through 'feelings and emotions which make the world as we know and live it' (2009, p. 9) I seek to take up that challenge in this chapter in relation to how XR uses grief, hope, love and pride in conjunction with vulnerability.

Researchers over the last two decades have increasingly used methods that recognise how important emotions are to the understanding of activism and how it functions. They have explored what emotions are present or describable in activism and social movements and which influence, inspire or deter others and activists to take action. They have also examined what is necessary to sustain the emotional commitment for long term activism (Brown and Pickerill, 2009). Activists work to transform the raw material of emotion into specific values, beliefs, and options for action. This may involve *moral shocks* which inspire the move to action when the realisation of a problematic concern raises a sense of outrage or rage in a person inclining them to become active (Goodwin and James, 2007). Goodwin and James identify emotions as the 'raw materials' (2007, p. 618) that develop public sympathy for movements and activist recruitment. According to Scheff (2018) leaders mobilise by appeals to *shame* and *pride*, with shame deactivating or inhibiting action, and pride enabling or activating it. Goodwin and James suggest that:

Shame cripples action, as do moods of resignation or depression. Anger, outrage, indignation, and pride, on the other hand, encourage action..... action is sparked through emotional dynamics. A sense of agency is important for both recruiting new members and motivating existing ones (2007, p. 619).

In addition, Goodwin and James (2007) suggest that emotions are important to activists developing beliefs and options for action, play a role in the internal dynamics of movements, and are crucial to the interactions of activists and movements with others. In conclusion they identify two lacunae. The first is how activists negotiate emotions that engage insiders and outsiders of movements. 'Emotional appeals and displays that work with one audience may hurt with another, and it is difficult in today's world to segregate these audiences' (Goodwin and James, 2007, p. 630). The second is, that in researching social movements, many

scholars seem to 'lump all emotions together' (Goodwin and James, 2007, p. 630) rather than teasing out what different emotions, and different types of emotion do. Kleres and Asa (2017) identify that fear, hope, anger and guilt are pivotal emotions to climate activists. In addition, the way these emotions are managed, and how they combine or are combined, affects activists' motivations and mobilising strategies, with emotions energising and orienting all actions. They argue that the paralysing potential of fear is mediated by hope; Hope being generated by collective action and assisting in managing fear.

Woods, et al. (2012) propose a ladder of emotions to help visualise protest mobilisation. The ladder starts with emotions of attachment to place or identity, the second rung moves to emotions arising from perceived threat, the third rung being emotions reacting to failure of political systems to represent interests, the fourth rung emotions of actual protest participation with the last rung those emotions of strengthening militancy such as defiance. Finally, there are potential emotions of withdrawal such as exhaustion and disillusionment. Below in Figure 15 is the visual illustration of the Woods et al., (2012) ladder of emotions.

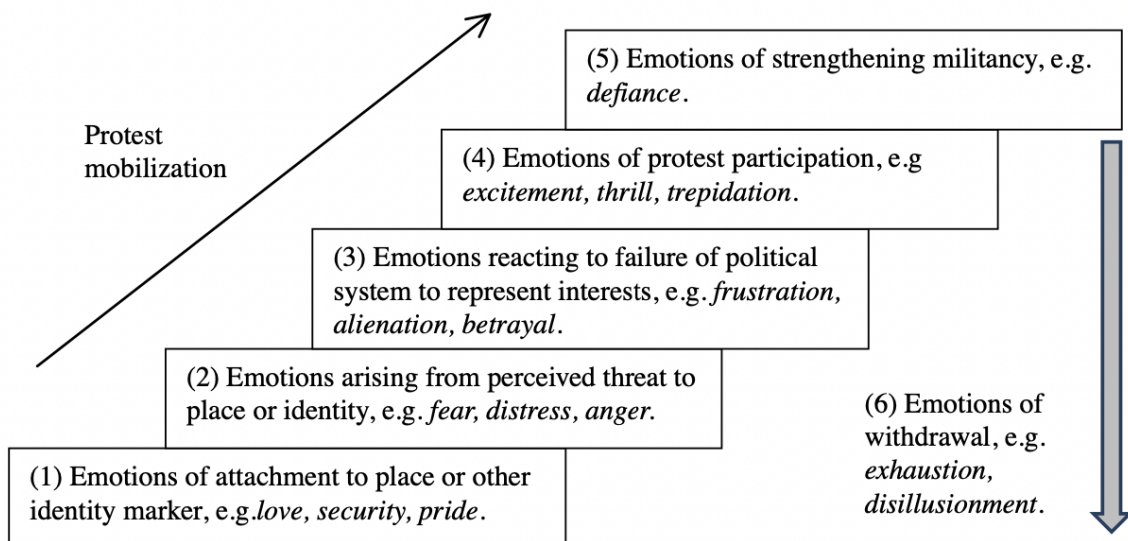


Figure 15: The ladder of emotions in protest mobilisation (Woods et al., 2012, p. 272).

Woods et al., (2012) also identify six potential characteristics of the activist /emotion entanglement. Firstly, that the emotions that are relevant to political behaviour are strongly connected to value systems. Secondly, that they can be individual and collective. Thirdly, that although emotions mobilise social movements, social movements also actively reproduce and transform emotions. Fourthly, that emotions can change the strategies and tactics of social movements and fifthly they are used to recruit new members, shape public opinion and provoke emotions in onlookers. Finally, emotions are involved in social movement decline. To draw out the importance and impact of emotions, feeling and affect in contemporary environmental activism I now in turn examine XR's activism's use of grief, hope, love and pride in conjunction with vulnerability.

Grief

One of the founder members of XR, Gail Bradbrook (2019), argues that grief is an essential activist emotion because there is something about grieving that opens the space for love, which opens the space for courage and that courage is essential in this struggle against climate change and for climate justice. In XR's handbook *This is not a Drill* the activist authors explain XR's strategy, tactics and objectives in seeking to engage grief.

What is required of us psychologically to engage with rather than cut off from this knowledge?..... To come into knowing is to come into sorrow. A sorrow that arrives with a thud, deadening and fearful. Sorrow is hard to bear. With sorrow comes grief and loss. Not easy feelings. Nor is guilt, nor fury, nor despair. Climate sorrow, if we can call it that, opens up into wretched states of mind and heart. We can find it unbearable. Without even meaning to repress or split off our feelings, we do so. I'm doing so now as I write. Staying with such feelings can be bruising and can make us feel helpless and despairing. It is hard, very hard, to stay with, and yet there is value in this if we can create context for doing so (Orbach, 2019, 66-67).

And

We need to accept our own feelings of grief and fear and we need to provoke conversations that touch the hearts of others. In doing so we will build a movement that can handle the horrors we are facing, without the secondary issue of internal denial. We will be more, not less, robust. More, not less, effective. More, not less, compelling (Orbach, 2019, 68).

So how does this grief and the work of mourning in XR's climate change activism assist in discovering the political and ethical possibilities, such as those that can translate to action, lead to framing shifts, and the focus on the more than human as objects of mourning and concerted political action? Grief and mourning are experienced in, and mapped upon, firstly physical spaces, that can be public and/or private. Secondly, the embodied-psychological spaces of the entangled mind and body and thirdly virtual spaces such as social media, religious belief-based communities and other non-place-based communities (Maddrell, 2016). The Summer 2019 east London uprising used grief as a central activist emotion.

The jazz band at the front of the march played dirges for the funeral and the samba band took up the rear. The march was live streamed on Facebook. Heart and tear emojis, along with comments, rolled up the screen as we made slow progress along Mare Street towards London Fields. Local people seemed interested to understand why we were there, smiling, taking photos, engaging in short conversations and looking at the leaflets. Shoppers stopped for a while, as if their everyday life was on pause. Windows and doors opened. People looked and came out. This action has such great props, with bees on sticks, huge skeletons carried aloft and animal flags. We are all doing something and doing it together. I felt really proud to be part of the action. I have read how taking action together binds people and groups together and as I walked through Hackney today I realised what creating solidarity actually feels like. This performance and performing activism felt good. They waved and cheered. I realised that this funeral march was about grief and loss. We were mourning. We weren't pretending to mourn ...we really were mourning, individually and collectively. I could feel it. The slow melodic music expressed the grief of the loss and extinction of non-human nature. It was sad but also unexpectedly brought the activists and the audience together in thinking about our impact on the planet. This expression of grief was engaging, purposeful, and I felt sad, fearful and excited all at the same time (Field Diary 13.07.19).

The use of the death march in urban spaces and places demonstrates the power of grief as an activist emotion in engaging those undertaking their practices of everyday life and changing activists and audiences. The death march in exhibiting grief for the climate emergency and loss of non-human bodies, spaces and places, both individually and collectively, is given expression through this work of mourning. It recognises and shows our vulnerability. It inspires us to take action. It inspires us to give representation to that grief through music and dance. The clashing of cymbals

and the beating of drums in private and in public settings. Anticipatory grief at what may be lost in the future as well as grief for what has already gone, with an understanding of the possibilities forgone, is mobilising and not disempowering allowing the imagining of possibilities more clearly. Anticipatory grief has two dimensions. Firstly, grief in the present about what will be lost in the future and secondly feelings of anticipating, but not yet experiencing, grief.

I heard Ian Bray, a founder member of XR speaking today at a seminar. He talked about the importance of escaping binary political perspectives, acting with reverence and gratitude avoiding blaming and shaming people developing a regenerative culture, doing work about grief and promoting self-awareness and openness (Field Diary 20.09.19)

By taking to the streets, we gave this grief space to be seen and demonstrated and witnessed. It gave a window to others about the injustices of the climate emergency. It gave a powerful voice to the impact of the climate emergency demanding attention and provoking emotion in others. So rather than grief causing activist paralysis, this sort of expression of grief allows activists to express grief, to share grief, to enter into conversations about loss and grief. It brings representations of the nonhuman into the populated inner city urban space. It demonstrates our capacity to grieve for the more than human and has the capacity to bring people of difference together, to provide a connection.

Much of the literature argues that evoking grief and fearful emotions are counterproductive. Although evoking these emotions may attract people's attention, get people to take notice, and raise the profile of any issue in their consciousness, they are less successful at recruiting to social movements or inspiring people to take action in the long term. It is argued that this is because individuals can become desensitised to appeals that seek to generate fear as well as producing unintended emotional reactions such as cynicism, apathy or denial. This draws attention to the connections and relationship between grief and fear.

Results demonstrate that although such representations have much potential for attracting people's attention to climate change, fear is generally an ineffective tool for motivating genuine personal engagement..... everyday

emotions and concerns in the context of this macro environmental issue tend to be the most engaging' (O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole, 2009, 355).

However, Kleres and Asa (2017) propose that in the context of climate change and environmental activism fear might instead be a reason to actually take action. Grief often flows from events that cause personal distress which can cause anxiety, a sense of powerlessness and fear. It can cause emotional numbness, overwhelm, and stop our ability to act individually and collectively. There can be grief for loss in both the human and more than human world.

My research on XR's contemporary activism has paid attention to activist grief as a response to climate change and its impact on people as well as biodiversity, species and ecosystems loss or endangerment. XR Buddhists have given leadership within XR on the centrality of grief in a climate emergency. The Buddhist writer Shantigarba argues that anxiety, trauma, and a sense of being overwhelmed and powerless can block our ability to act, but rather than trying to *fix it* or *push it away*, we can create space for mourning (Shantigarbha, 2022). This grief and mourning 'holds the potential for expanding climate change discourse in ethically and productive ways' (Willcox, 2012, p. 137) Mourning is work:

[Mourning is] long, hard, laborious work, which may never be concluded. This work is always and simultaneously personal, political, and ethical, and corporeally embodied. It is a process full of often-uncontrollable emotional and corporeal responses, such as grief, pain, anguish, sadness, devastation, denial, and affects, emergent from the shock of losing something or someone that was loved, valued, and important (Willcox, 2012, p. 142).

So, grief connects you with your body and allows imaginaries of how to value and represent the loss. It is often personal but inspires activists to live the loss. Mourning allowed activists to meet in a community and plan for action.

Hope

Hope is another important emotion used by XR activists which I explore in this section, as well as the relationship between hope and anger. So, what does hope do and how, why and when did these hopes emerge? What was the context that opened up the space *for* hope that created the spaces *of* hope? What damaged

hope and diminished it? How was it mobilised, legitimised, inspired, and sustained and what made the activists hopeful? Activists' hopefulness developed in the present, shaped the near future and sometimes became a collective hope imaginary. Between actions hope developed both in planning actions but in sharing life experiences. For example:

Hackney XR meeting on Tuesday at 8:00 pm at Round Chapel. S2 looked overcome by the number of people at the meeting may have been over 100. She talked about developing hopefulness together. J1 lawyer introduced himself as an old lefty. Split into groups B3 and B7 went into the politics group. J1 said 'So I hope to resist all this crap. Hope helps me resist and it's like poking them in the eye with a big stick (Field Diary 30.04.19).

Hackney XR weekly meeting smaller group but lots of new people. Notes of meeting in file. S2 chaired. We spent most of the time planning actions and saying what we all hoped for. Lots of our hopes were shared and it made me feel as if, despite being very different, we had a common hope and purpose and strangely also a happiness (Field Diary 06.05.19).

Analysis of the data gathered by activist smartphone doings, triangulated with field diary recordings, to identify that most of the hopefulness resulted from activists' interaction with each other, both during, and between actions. In actions the opportunities for interaction, such as protest camps, helped to incubate hope and as the encamped communities developed feelings of belonging, hope and solidarity grew.

I feel the hopefulness in myself and in other members of my local XR group. Marble Arch has a party mood and I sit and listen to rhythmic drumming and people talking to the police about climate change. Some appear bored, others interested as the activists are picking up rubbish. The last activists have been removed from Parliament Square and traffic resumes. Has it returned to normal or has something changed? A feeling of sadness that this phase is over but there also is a sense of hopefulness and that things can change built on an emerging solidarity and efficacy. Overwhelming feeling of the end of a stage in large part due to the emotional and physical exhaustion, but still that strong underlying feeling of hope. S2 agreed (Field Diary 21.04.2019).

Hope was about activists endeavouring to bring about what they hoped for and so it is a practice being something that activists do rather than have. It starts with clarity

about the climate emergency we face, identifying change we want to see and then taking steps to move ourselves and others in that direction. Anderson (2006) sees three expressions of hope.

First, flows of hope that take place as transindividual affectivities which move between bodies; second, hopefulness as a constellation of specific bodily background feelings emergent from the expression of affect; third, actual hopes that emerge through processes of qualification and are distinguished by possessing a determinate object (Anderson, 2006, 741).

Hope is different from optimism. Hope is a state where the future is seen as open and enabling rather than predetermined. Kraftl's (2008) understanding of hope is different to Anderson's and he identifies four conceptualisations. Although Kraftl's conceptualisations of hope relate to childhood and young people, they are helpfully generalisable, particularly to a movement that has a generational component in its activism and a noticeable youth activism. These conceptualisations are firstly hope that relates to the future (futurity), secondly hope that relates to logic, thirdly universal hope and fourthly pragmatic hope. Kraftl has some reservations about the effect of a conceptualisation of future hope and its potential to obscure a sense of hope and agency in the present and near future. A logic of hope which predicts with some certainty a consequential improvement on the object or actor of the logic of that hope (he focuses on children as the object/actor) as a repository for that hope may excuse others from needing to take action. Universal hope, which is a 'widespread hoping so powerful that it assumed the form of a logic that exceeds particular moments and that seems immutable' (Kraftl, 2008, p. 84) may find expression in a pressing need to seek out and an acceptance of utopias. Lastly pragmatic hope, that rather than seeking revolution or system change, promotes and pursues hope in more *realistic* reforms and imaginaries. This reminds me of Meyerson's (2003) concept of the *Tempered Radical*.

There are tensions between Anderson and Kraftl's conceptualisations of hope. For example, in addressing the climate emergency XR has been criticised for adopting, expecting and promoting utopian, rather than pragmatic hope. XR in hoping for *unrealistic* system change, resulting in climate justice imaginaries in the near term, rather than *realistic* step by step changes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to

net zero over the next thirty years. For example, the XR target of reducing emissions to net zero by 2025 rather than the UK target date of 2050 is considered unrealistic and far too hopeful. XR activists argue, that radical targets will widen the Overton window allowing conversations and debates that were previously impossible⁴⁷ (Harding, 2020). Nevertheless, utopian universal hope mobilises thousands of activists and challenges the establishment to different imaginaries whilst pragmatic hope seems to have fallen short of what is required.

Hope is essential in activism because it is hope that manages fear and inspires action which in turn produces more hope (Kleres and Asa, 2017). Hope is the medicine for stress and distress which creates a space and a time to contemplate how things may be otherwise, with future imaginaries contrasting with present reality. As Anderson and Fenton put it, 'In the shadow of a hopeless world, thinking and feeling with hope promises a way of disclosing moments or instances in which things could become otherwise' (2008, p. 77). Following Anderson's and Fenton's framework for analysis of hope. How do specific hopes emerge or how are they mobilised? What do the events of hope, and the acts of hoping do? What is hope's relationship with the multiple forms of power that it expresses and those that it disrupts? Hope 'like other forms of confidence, stimulates action because we think it can be successful. But too much hope may undermine realistic assessments of a situation and discourage information gathering' (Jasper, 2007, p. 85). For example, it has been argued that inducing feelings of hope and optimism about climate change may lower motivations to engage in mitigation efforts (Chapman, et al., 2017).

A response to these concerns is the concept of *Active Hope*, promoted and developed by Macey and Johnstone (2012) in their book and subsequent online training, which has influenced how many XR activists engage individually with hope and hopefulness via local groups which has been developed by XR Buddhists. Local groups have arranged collective online training, or active hope reading groups, to explore and critique the concept. So active hope does not require optimism and can apply even where there is hopelessness but is a guiding impetus to choose to act

⁴⁷ The Overton window is the spectrum of ideas on public policy and social issues considered acceptable by the general public at a given time.

and express the change we wish to see. Active hope is focused on building personal resilience by recognising how entangled the survival of human and nonhuman species are in a context of generations, that have a lifespan of centuries, stepping beyond the personal or even the familial and seeing us living in a wider temporal situation. This opens up time and connections with future beings that can become more important and real to us.

My research revealed an importance in the naming of hope. Because hope is about the future it invokes the temporal. Where climate change can be *out there and in the future* and distant, hope has a temporal quality that brings resolutions nearer and into the present. Hope builds that bridge between the *rational* future and the *emotional* present and therefore gives activists agency and the feeling that they can affect both the present and the future. For some activists hope unsettled and challenged their construction of the world. For others it acted as a recruitment to action by showing them glimpses of what may be possible. Glimpses that they wanted to see more clearly, or in a more sustained way and be part of. Hope gave them permission to explore previously unknown possibilities in the present and future. But being hopeful is risky and it exposes vulnerability when feelings of possibilities become diminished and the spaces for hope are more difficult to occupy. I found that hope, in contrast to despair or hopelessness, was an activist's form of resistance against the everyday challenges. Although hope contrasts with despair or hopelessness, it was not activists' experience of these that mobilised them to seek out hope, but rather their wish to resist what they had witnessed in the experiences of others and what they saw around them. It was a response to those promoting fatality and a blatant ignoring of the climate emergency and the injustices it causes today and in the future.

This hope found expression in the everyday, as well as shaping the creative and hopeful actions on the streets of London and other organising spaces, which resulted in tangible and empowering moments of hope which left its traces on the activist and the activism. The connection between the 'everyday hope', and 'spectacular hope' is important in the mobilisation and sustainability of the activism. Hope created and supported activists belonging and solidarity. This was a *process* of hope and hoping both individual and collective. There was no object of hope, no source to be relied

upon; it was the activists' process of hoping which was the mobilising force. For others faith, as I examine later in this chapter, gave hope legitimacy and created a source of hope.

I now turn to anger's important and intimate relationship with hope. There are many expressions of rage or anger, but it is not a simple emotion; it can be associated with things that are humorous but demands attention and can lead to creative interventions in public space that politicise the streets and other organising spaces and claim rights. For example, XR's leaflets and protest stickers often overlooked as creative interventions give embodiment to this emotion (Awcock, 2021). Anger can be sought to be generated in opposition to opponents, to goad other protagonists and seek to use it as an emotion to provoke actions which will discredit others.

Protesters and forces of order frequently taunt each other in this way, hoping the other will discredit themselves through hasty actions, later regretted.... or to startle or frighten them in order to paralyse them (Jasper, 2007, p. 84).

When others react in anger at peaceful protestors it diminishes the resistance and amplifies the activist message. For example, at a Mansion House dinner on 20 June 2019 a group of climate change protestors interrupted a speech by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Video footage captured Conservative Member of Parliament Mark Field grabbing an environmental activist by the neck and forcing her out of the room. Mark Field had previously written to the Metropolitan Police commissioner to complain about the police's lack of urgency in dealing with XR activists during the April 2019 rebellion. The video shows him appearing to react angrily and with force and although his actions were supported by some, it was seen as an unprovoked assault by many more. Subsequently a Cabinet Office investigation into the allegation of assault concluded that he had breached the ministerial code. He is no longer a Member of Parliament.

However, anger in XR activists did not lead to aggression towards others. Despite identifying anger being expressed and exhibited by activists on many occasions I have never seen this spill over to aggression or violence despite numerous provocations and opportunities for this to happen. The argument that anger

necessarily leads to negative outcomes and should be avoided is not borne out by this research. Hope and anger are also neither always the opposite of each other nor mutually exclusive emotional states, but they are intertwined. My activist experiences encourage me to write in defence of anger. Not anger that flows with losing control but when anger is purposeful and focused it can motivate prosocial action. When expressed in this way anger is as powerful and disarming as hope and can connect with what it is to care and be human. In addition, as Henderson argues, 'anger involves an assessment of blame for perceived injustice' and 'opens the door to specific claims for redress' (2008, p. 34) that challenge the current orthodoxy. In XR activism, whose fundamental demand is for climate justice; anger will always therefore have an important place not only as a tactic and repertoire but as a deep-seated emotional context for these activism.

Love

XR makes a claim to be motivated by love. Love for nature. Love for fellow humans and more than humans, particularly those that are most impacted by climate change. In this section firstly I examine how love can be generally understood, secondly how the concept of love is evoked when analysing its relationship with activism and social justice more broadly and lastly, I examine how XR activism operationalize the emotion of love in practice and what this does and how it works.

Candiotto and De Jaegher (2021) suggest an approach that sees love as entangled with the processes of living and of knowing. With loving a pivot point for understanding how humans know and see the world, with love as participatory sense-making. For Jollimore (2011) love is an emotion that demands empathy and calls us away from excessive self-concern. Love is neither wholly moral nor deeply immoral, neither purely rational nor profoundly irrational. Love is a concern for the wellbeing of others, about saving them, about redemption. It is fighting in the name of others and makes those that love, vulnerable and exposed. But love is also about a way of bonding and the shaping of bonding with others and needs to have an object of that love. Love links with other emotions so for example, mourning and grief become an expression of love lost or rejected and has an intimate relation with grief depending upon how the subject responds to the lost object. When actions are taken either in the name of love, or out of love, those actions claim a higher value and

worth (Ahmed, 2014). Love for another can also go hand in hand with acts of love for other humans and more than humans.

Love can be a political concept with the potential to shape and propel radical politics and evoked and used to promote and encourage social change (Berlant, 2011; Carabelli, 2019). It is used as a provocation to radical action and a justification for it. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in his letter from Birmingham City Jail 'Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment' (King, 1991, p. 298). Carabelli, when assessing the potential of love to move communities and become a force for change argues 'love is transformative, a key site for a collective becoming-different, that can help inform alternative imaginaries' (2019, p. 184). Carabelli, when considering Berlant's perspective on political love and how to use love to produce activist solidarity across difference, highlights that 'properly political love must be durable; it must provide a space as well as time and patience to deal with the unease that difference and contingency tend to incite in the making and remaking of worlds' (2019, p. 191). Jasper (2018) conceptualises love as one of a number of affective commitments. As one of the emotions of protest he focuses on how love for a group, who take action together is constructed over time and that love of one's group strengthens love of oneself and can be a source of pride. However, Jasper points to how the love of a group can be entwined with hatred for outsiders and that 'love for my protest group sets me up for sadness when it fights or disbands' (2018, p. 103).

Emerick (2021) analyses the relationship between love and activism and identifies three accounts of how activists appeal to love as a remedy for injustice. He calls these the *union* account of love, the *sentimentalist* account of love and love as *fate*. The union account of love involves extending the boundaries of the self and creating a new *we* or *us*. When *you* becomes *us* it affects what one perceives and how the world is experienced. In this way love can be transformative. It extends the possibility that you love people whom you may never have met or never will meet. Emerick identifies love as 'the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself.... because love is an act of courage, not fear, love is a commitment to others' (2021, p. 333). Secondly, sentimental love is affective or attitudinal. It is a love which is creative and redemptive, believing that everyone has the capacity to love means that everyone

has the capacity to change. It is an expectation and demand that we have and should exercise agency to promote justice. As I will examine later in this chapter it is often this appeal to love that faith groups use and rely upon in their activisms. Finally, Emerick (2021) identifies love as fate which relies upon a conception that a loving orientation or regard for others has an eventual inevitability of achieving social justice. With this view of love, it is a force that eventually brings goodness in the world. With each of these conceptions of love Emerick (2021) warns that with too shallow a lens each one of these appeals may tend to obscure important differences in which groups are socially situated or overlook ways in which injustice can be structural. In summing up the power of love Emerick identifies 'that we can use love not only to inspire our efforts but to help set our agendas in the first place, to help determine the aims of the political struggles we take up' (2021, p. 340). Using these three appeals to love I now turn to examine how XR activisms operationalise the use of love.

The focus of love for XR activists was not love of oneself, not primarily a romantic love, or love for friends or family, although all of these aspects of love were present at times. The most striking appeal to love was that which moved the boundaries of love from *self* to *us* and hoped, and sometimes believed with certainty, that this activism would bring change. A love for other humans and more than humans mostly who they would never meet or know.

Day 11 of the autumn rebellion. When I was at Trafalgar Square yesterday, I see from today's XR London newsletter that 150 XR Mothers sat outside Google UK, many of them breastfeeding. It reports "they are full of abundant love for their infants, while at the same time they are gripped by fear about whether the world their babies grow up into will be a habitable one...One could feel the force of these two emotions. The protest that had a stillness and poignancy.... and each woman wore a simple white sash with *Their Future* on the front". Yesterday in the citizens assembly we talked about love and rage. Not love for one's children but for those we didn't know. One rebel described it as the feeling of care because we are all in this together. It's quite a thing to get arrested for people you love but don't even know! (Field Diary 17.10.2019).

Russo (2018) describes the love activism that I experienced in XR, both when taking action and when seeking a regenerative culture with other rebels, as a daily radical

activism of kindness and a way to live when noticing cruelty, violence or injustice. This suggests that using love in activism involves service, empathy, nonviolence, self-care, hope, creativity, and mindfulness and is an important part of dismantling unjust structures, corporations and institutions (Russo, 2018).

XR Pic 'n' mix (a day of training and workshops)

I arrive at 184 Drummond Street up the stairs to have relaxed friendly place of calm. The offices look *lived in* with XR youth camping out all day in their own office We talk about XR educators changing the curriculum developing a regenerative culture, which the London regenerative culture coordinator said, "was a connexion between others ourselves and the earth". We talked about rebelling *for* and *with* love. We decided that this was about caring for others about taking action that was non-violent and hoping and believing that change would come. Sat next to a PhD researcher from Imperial scientists and a christian undergraduate from Manchester. Notice how critical some are about regenerative culture and that it is also a disruption. How can we all be in it together when there is so much inequality? Talk to XR Youth in their office about universities. Arrestee support mentioned the need accommodation and that the role was about emotional support.... active listening is important (Field Diary 11.05.19).

When XR activists described rebelling for love it included people, nature and the earth. It was about looking after each other with a kindness for others, caring for others whilst being kind to oneself. It was the opposite of hate and linked to the development of trust. Trust in each other and trust that change would come, and activism could make a difference. When XR activists practised rebelling for love and took action they did this with love and rage. They did it together, rarely by themselves, and taking action together often produced stronger feelings of love and community. So rebelling *for* and *with* love is powerful conceptually and in practice, but messy and overlapping. Sometimes the boundaries of love were not visible or able to be articulated. Sometimes, such as at a moment of arrest the boundaries of love became apparent and it became more obvious that we were not all in it together. Sometimes sentimental love and love as fate were overlapping or less visible. sometimes more obvious with hope that love will ultimately triumph and achieve change.

For a small group of activists Emerick's three appeals to love were also entwined with romantic love. Activists taking action during a rebellion as an act of love with their partner.

Two nights previously, I was hand-fastened with - and to - my partner at Parliament Square. Our hands were held together with love and super glue, the moon shining over Westminster Abbey. Courting in the middle of a rebellion (Griffiths, 2019, 95).

In my affinity group there were two activists who were romantically involved before they joined XR. They took action together, looking out for each other and going home together.

Although activist love may come upon you suddenly it is often constructed overtime. It is conceptually broad and deep and in practise messy and overlapping. It is collective but with deeply personal implications.

Pride

Affects, feelings and emotions of pride (and its inseparable alter ego shame) entangles people and place in profound and more mundane ways. The embodiment of pride entangles those bodies and places. So, paying attention to pride, thinking critically about it, draws attention to how pride entangles place, affects, feelings, emotions and power. In many cases pride and shame intermingle. Movements that seek to invoke, engender and use pride (such as gay pride) help marginalised communities, groups and individuals work through feelings of shame to embrace feelings of pride.

The East London uprising started today. There for 9.30..Went to the guerrilla garden at Graham Rd... the garden of earthly delights. I went with Paul to put up the flags and the 'act now' banner. The garden looked great. It was calm and peaceful with people pottering about. I handed out leaflets and talked to passers by. One said that it used to be a second hand car sales lot and it was much better now. Onto London Fields where a long dance started. So much work has gone into preparing for this. S3 , mother earth, was flitting about like a bee. She organised and coordinated the production of the creative artefacts used in the action and was fretting most of the time. She said she wanted to make people feel proud of what we were doing and to make sure it got noticed. Yes, I did feel really proud of what we had done. How we were

noticed and what we achieved making people notice and engage in the climate emergency and its impact on nature (Field Diary 13.07.19).

In this context when linked with aspirations to pride, shame is not paralysing or negative, but a starting point or route to something productive (Johnston, 2019). So, pride is the emotion that keeps out shame, which is a painful feeling of being unworthy. Shame is a deep-seated emotion which is not just about guilt over any specific action or inaction. Pride is generated when we live up to our ideals. In XR activism it can be linked to a feeling of making and being part of history with all of the agency that this demands.

Pride can be intensely personal, and often linked to higher feelings of sacrifice when involved in activism that demands commitment and risks. As Jasper (2007) points out:

.... Pride need not depend on external audiences. We can feel proud of ourselves for doing the right thing even if no one else knows, and even if we do not survive to enjoy any acclaim. When we are our own audience in this way, deontological pride comes close to a feeling of dignity, a key motivation for participation, even or especially in high-risk activities (p. 88).

It can also emerge when taking actions together, particularly when they are creative. When a collective pride emerges, it builds resilience, alliances and solidarities.

With time, people feel emotionally attached to these roadblock presences. They are defining cultural features of newly emerging micro-communities who will go to extreme lengths to protect them. This was particularly true of roadblocks that acted as creative platforms or stages: an open sided van on the bridge hosting concerts and performers, and, of course, the Big Pink Boat (Ruby, 2019, 115).

In some individual activists pride created a sense of purpose, a sense of accomplishment and a sense of responsibility. Collectively pride created belonging, solidarity, comradeship and a sense that as activists together they were part of something which was greater than themselves.

Vulnerability

Activists may be vulnerable, use vulnerability to further or promote their activism or become vulnerable as a result of their activism. For example, people with mental

health vulnerability have been drawn to take part in direct action and then relied on others to support them (Plows, 2002). Being vulnerable and showing vulnerability has also been developed as an effective activist tactic and repertoire. Vulnerability with conspicuous sacrifice, can shift public consciousness making messages more accessible and forcefully illuminate different perspectives on how the world could be (Doherty, 1999). Sustained activism can lead to vulnerability with burnout (Brown and Pickerill, 2009) or other adverse mental health outcomes (Ni, et al., 2020). In January 2020 three XR activists published a pamphlet *Rushing the emergency, rushing the rebellion?* which examined the progress made by XR and what lessons there were for future progress (Lopatin, et al., 2020). It was an invitation for rebels to coalesce around a new story and vision. A story that is human-centric, as opposed to environmental. Focusing on *nearer-term* climate emergency problems as evidenced by the vulnerability of a world *locked-in* to unpredictable and extreme weather events. It explored the risks and benefits of using and focusing on human and more than human vulnerability, proposing refocusing the movement actions on vulnerability. The central theme of the pamphlet was the proposition that there were *opportunities and threats of vulnerability* in which individual and collective vulnerability could be key to success.

As part of taking action, I supported some activists who had been arrested and some that were vulnerable. In this section I explore vulnerability through my experiences with an activist who I met whilst taking action and supported after his arrest, during his court case and subsequently. S1⁴⁸ had been arrested for protesting at a Shell petrol garage near Marble Arch against that company's exploration, production, refining and sale of petroleum products. He was a 57-year-old man who identified as being Irish and was homeless having been evicted from his previous address. He was passionate, very well informed about climate change, thoughtful and vulnerable.

K1 Asked me to support someone at Westminster Magistrates Court on the 12th of June. S1 phoned at eight o'clock and we spoke for 20 or 30 minutes. He didn't know what the charges were, but he thought it could be quite serious. He sounded vulnerable and wanted help and support. He said it was

⁴⁸ Before using field diary excerpts about S1, I considered carefully the ethical implications of publishing our experiences together. I discussed this in detail with S1 and he was insistent that he wanted me to use this as an opportunity to tell some small part of his story. I have however anonymised who he is in this thesis.

important to be smart and did I have a black tie I could lend him. He'd been in hospital for 10 days. (Field Diary 28.05.19)

Up to City of London Magistrates Court for the arrestee support of S1. Tight security with metal detecting arches and body frisking. Leave my umbrella with the security guard. Meet K1 in the lobby. Meet S1 and give him a thin black tie. S1's case is adjourned to 20th of June at Westminster Magistrates Court due to non-disclosure. He hugs and kisses his brief on parting. We repair to the nearest Starbucks, and I get S1 a cappuccino and a croissant. He keeps my tie! (Field Diary 12.06.19).

Hendon Magistrates Court today. S1 gave me a packet of potato soup. I took it as a gift. It was something he was giving back. He said that during his arrest he was punched in the stomach, and his hand was stamped on. He was lying under a petrol tanker in the shell garage forecourt, making himself vulnerable. He said vulnerable and disruptive. He sent me an email about his feelings and court appearances which talked about the court appearances being part of his protest and the unfairness of it all. The email was headed *Feelings* (Field Diary 21.06.19).

Hi Stephen. This is the way I feel on the other side!!! In the court. It really is an extension of the protest altogether. No matter how anyone may view a small court hearing. Everything evolves in this social movement, and should do so. For the better. But we make mistakes and learn from that. A flower has no time to make mistakes as it blossoms each year, but climate change is like a rolling stone. It is like a flower. It's mother earth. And mother earth's metabolism is very strained. Everyone and everything is affected and it even filters down into society to the homeless. We have to sacrifice things for things to change. We do not walk past anyone who is sick or dying without helping. Signed. Truth, love and passion. S (Field Diary 21.06.19)

S1 is on trial at Hendon today. The police, the tanker driver and the petrol garage manager all gave evidence. Found not guilty of the public order offences but guilty of criminal damage. The judge said it was not in the interests of justice to invoke his suspended sentence and he was fined. However, the fine was deemed served as he spent one day in police custody. I felt quite tearful. Hugs all round. We all took photos outside the court, next to the 'Act Now' banner. We went to lunch in a local café. S1 talked about Shell and Nigeria and gave me a poster and leaflet about Ken Saro-wiwa which he produced from his rucksack. The judge called S1 eccentric!' (Field Diary 05.09.19)

XR activists made themselves vulnerable as part of their repertoire. Part of that vulnerability is entwined with risk. When you decide to take action that exposes your vulnerability, or makes you vulnerable, you cannot be clear about exactly what emotions will be generated in and by your activism. Part of vulnerability is also that you cannot be clear about the outcomes and consequences of your direct action and civil disobedience personally or collectively. When one of the risks of taking action is arrest, prosecution and court sanctions vulnerability is real, tangible and on show.

Buses backed up all the way to Cannon Street activists chanting people got the power, power to the people almost like a religious chant. Some rebels in shirts ties and suits. Every time a rebel is arrested cheers go up with shouts through the crowd of *we love you*. The activists are carried like deadweights by groups of police to the corner of Mansion House and lined up outside its entrance. Lots of young people here today. I notice a middle-aged woman sitting peacefully in the middle of the road waiting to be arrested she looked vulnerable and I noticed the importance of the moment of arrest both for the activist and those supporting her. Arrests happened in waves and those waves create sense of apprehension but purpose and power as well. Affect circulates around these XR actions and can be seen in the around the moment of arrest and the waves of arrest generating powerful feelings and emotions (Field Diary 14.10.2019).

In paying attention to the vulnerability of activists you notice how vulnerability impacts on other activists, spectators and some of the police officers. In paying attention to the moment of arrest one notices how alliances are built and solidarity grows. You also notice who is arrested and who is not arrested and how activists are arrested differently and the impact this has. I continue to explore other aspects of vulnerability in the next sections.

Performing arts

Performing arts, such as poetry reading, music, dance and street theatre, are rituals that can become critical components to generate and build powerful emotions, feelings and affect and convey messages about politics and change. Paying attention to affect, with its intensities that give value and significance to the moment without being fully explainable, help to understand the full impact of performance.

Rebels getting arrested again at Oxford Circus, the atmosphere became tenser. I sensed the pressing forward of the crowd and the ominous feeling of more police arriving. XR drummers arrived and the mood lifted and the chanting of Extinction....Rebellion to the beat of the drums took off. (Field Diary 18.04.2019)

The sound of singing, drumming and chanting played a critical, and sometimes unrecognised part, in mobilising individuals or collective bodies.

The affordances of sound have the capacity to intensify the energies already circulating in and in between human and nonhuman bodies. Sound triggers strong affective and emotive responses (Waitt et al., 2014, p. 298).

The sound of music with a powerful combination of words and concerted action creates a kind of 'collective effervescence' (Jasper, 2007, p. 73). As Skeaping recalls when being part of XR's actions on the streets of London in 2019:

Then, out of nowhere, drums. The sound getting louder. That's not just a few, that's a *lot* of drums. There's an army heading this way. As they come into view, a smile breaks across your face. The goosebumps are back, but this time it's excitement. The reinforcements are here. The energy returns. (2019, p. 138)

Street theatre, unlike music and dance, 'almost always requires an audience distinct from the performers' (Jasper, 2007, p. 74). Blood was a common feature of XR's actions and performances. Using fake blood to douche buildings, roads and steps. Harding described one of these actions as producing 'a pool of fake blood, like a Mafia shootout' (2020, p. 5). The Red Rebel Brigade, in their red cloaks and headdresses and white faces, symbolise the common blood humans share with all species and highlights the connection and unity with other fauna. The Brigade's performance is to *move as one* so that they can act as one force and feel as one: a wave of protest. Their intention is to divert, distract, delight and inspire the people who watch them. Their silent powerful performance supported the arrestables and de-escalated confrontational situations. They blocked roads by crossing slowly or flocking in junctions, but only long enough to provoke emotive responses. They claim that they use love as their only weapon (Red rebel brigade, 2021).

There are a range of other performance and arts groups who are aligned or associated with XR activism. For example, Culture Declares Emergency, The Landing Crew and Writers Rebel. Culture Declares Emergency is an international movement of individuals and organisations in the arts and cultural sectors declaring a climate and ecological emergency and demanding that people, organisations and governments start telling the truth, taking action and seeking justice around climate change. (Culture declares emergency, 2019). The Landing Crew are a dance group who have based their performance on the movement of aircraft landing staff who bring an aircraft from the runway to the stand. With an interest in the power of stillness, they focus on slow movement and other forms of non-verbal communication. Through a movement called semaphore they spell out the words as a group emergency. These 'Coordinated actions are deeply satisfying' (Jasper, 2007, p. 74). Writers Rebel uses the power of words to claim a safer, fairer future for all the planet's inhabitants, the human and non-human. Seeking to celebrate and encourage writing that challenges damaging systems, champions coming generations, and envisions alternative futures identifying emotions to achieve change 'If grief is love without a home, then our love for this declining natural world must find new channels for expression' (Rebel, 202).

In chapter four I examined how naked protest drew attention to place and feelings of in and out of place but nakedness in protest can also be a performance, an ethical performance of vulnerability. It demonstrates the human corporeality in the place of protest and draws attention to the human and nonhuman in the environment (Alaimo, 2010). It highlights the interdependent and interwoven human and more than human. As a means of protest nakedness challenged agents of the state to keep their distance, observe and witness. Aware of the danger of coming close 'Bearing their bodies to the elements, the protestors bravely unveiled their own vulnerability as a political, ethical stance' (Alaimo, 2010, p. 24).

XR Art blockers are central to XR's creative design and support the performing arts. During the October 2019 rebellion block printing stations were part of the protest with groups from across the UK at multiple sites. For example, at Admiralty Arch near Trafalgar Square activists and the public were invited to create their own art as a form of protest and performance. This invitation to passers-by to become part of the

activism and performance when taken up, created hope, and allowed creative new forms of protest.

Another important function of performance is that it conveyed to audiences and opponents that they are witnessing an organised event rather than a spontaneous uprising. It questions who the audience or audiences are and what is the impact. XR activists broke down boundaries creating common ground and awareness between the audience and the activists which allowed the demonstration of emotions, feeling and affect to move between and amongst those present. In addition, it sustained the activists being an experience that motivated them to take and retake action. As examined earlier in this chapter different performances summoned and used different emotions. For example, death marches acting as a provocation to grief, and hope. Different performances were stages for grief, hope, pride, love and vulnerability, located in particular places giving meaning to those places and drawing meaning from them. As discussed in the previous chapter, performance is an opportunity to explore and connect across difference, including different generations. Performance, ritual and chants can bind people of difference together particularly when coming together in front of an audience or to challenge the powerful.

The use of and appeals to Faith

Faith groups have been an important feature of XR activists since XR was launched in 2018, with emotion, feeling and affect being central to their activism. On the first day of the Autumn 2019 rebellion Directors of The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Christian Aid and Tearfund came and spoke to activists of faith on Lambeth Bridge to encourage and pray for them. By Monday evening police had cleared the bridge arresting Christian, Buddhist and Muslim leaders engaged in peaceful non-violent, civil disobedience.

The Faith Bridge moved to Trafalgar Square, where the Muslim call to prayer, Buddhist meditation, Quaker worship, Christian Eucharists, and Jewish building of the Sukkot continued. The Anglican bishops of Chelmsford and Liverpool joined protestors with Bishop Paul Byers leading twenty vicars in reading the complete Book of Revelation from the Bible (Field Diary 15.10.2019).

I noticed Christian climate action today they were talking about love and rage, grief and hope outside the Treasury at the corner of St James' Park and the love rebellion. I got chatting to two activists who were involved in organising the Faith Bridge. They talked about how the church must resist the unholy Trinity of unrestrained capitalism, consumerism and individualism. "We are not on the bridge because we want to convert anyone. Facts and figures are not enough and people need to be galvanised. Stick together and talk about justice, care and suffering. In appealing to our faith we have hope and courage to put our bodies on the line" (Field Diary 08.10.2019).

Phil Kingston the 86 year old Christian climate activist made a defence statement today at the in London Crown Court where he is on trial for stopping a train at Shadwell station in October 2019. He talked about the impact that his father's death had on him when he was only three years old and how it affected his relationships for decades. He talked about loss and grief, but how he was now able to help others. He said he embraced their grief. He talked about his sacrifice and that "my understanding of the way Jesus is that he stood in solidarity with poor and exploited people and spoke the truth to the powerful. His action in driving out the moneylenders from the temple forecourt remains a central inspiration to my climate actions" (Field Diary 13.01.2022).

Christian Climate Action are a community of Christians supporting each other to take direct action in the face of imminent climate breakdown. They claim inspiration from Jesus Christ, and social justice movements of the past, and carried out acts of nonviolent direct action, taking that action in a spirit of repentance. They claimed that God as the creator, who cares about his creation and nature, called them to act and act in love and they call upon other Christians to support their protests. Their climate activism is an aspect of their mission.

Christian Climate Action have retweeted a video of the Reverend Vanessa Elston praying in protest with Extinction Rebellion outside of the Bank of England. She prays "I'm saying Lord, I need to change. Change me change my heart" as she stands on the middle of the road wearing her dog collar with eyes closed (Tweet 10.03 15.10.2019- Field Diary 15.10.2019).

For these activists of faith, hope stemmed from their belief in God and the power to inspire and call those who believe to respond to the climate emergency with sacrifice playing an important role. This is not hope that diminishes, in that it is not hope that everything will turn out alright but hope that by following the calling to take action

anything may be possible. Alongside deeply held convictions in faith they had deeply held convictions that action could change the world. Not in a naive way but in a purposeful, steady and all-encompassing belief, based upon personal changes made possible by faith and acts of faith, that change would come. It also allowed the development of an anger that was focused and purposeful. For example, Phil Kingston quoting how Jesus challenged the role of money lenders in the House of God points us to hope that human actions, supported by faith, can be redeemed and change.

It's a warm sunny day for September and hope is in the air. I can feel it again. I had a chat with Rowan Williams (former Archbishop of Canterbury) this morning on the grass beside Buckingham Palace before the march started to Parliament Square. He was talking about love not hate, anger and joy. At first, I walked slowly with Christian Climate Action behind their black XR banner proclaiming that 'creation cries out'. We chanted Love not hate ...we grow as one...and power to the people...people got the power. As we rounded the first corner, I re-joined XR Hackney behind the big yellow banner demanding Racial, social and climate justice. With the chants and the flares as we entered Parliament Square I felt re energised....When I got home I reread Rowan Williams afterword in 'This is not a drill' and it reminded me about his morning message. *'Anger, love and joy may sound like odd bedfellows, but these are the seeds of a future that will offer life- not success, but life'* (Field Diary 01 09.2021)

Joyce (2020), a member of XR, in reviewing the entanglement of XR and Christian historical experience notices three entanglements. The first a characterization of events within the world as potentially apocalyptic, secondly a vulnerability and thirdly experience of the apocalypse as a community, developing community strategies in response. However, Joyce (2020) identifies differences between Christian experience and XR . XR activists made the decision to actively become vulnerable where New Testament Christianity was often more passively vulnerable. Joyce identifies that 'Participation in civil disobedience helps you to rediscover the vulnerability that lies at the heart of the Christian experience and can be transformative' (2020, p. 13). Experiencing vulnerability in relation to climate change with 'other members of the movement gives rise to an emergent sense of sacredness, which resonates with the Christian participant' (Joyce 2020, p. 13).

People of faith entangled their faith with their activism and used complex and deep-seated emotions to create the potential for change.

Creative actions and disruption

Because XR is an actions led movement, that uses non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to achieve its goals, disrupting both physically and emotionally is at the centre of its strategy and tactics which presents possibilities to shift public consciousness and tell new stories about how the world could work differently.

XR publish a handbook This is not a drill which has been given an emergency rushed print by Penguin. It contains 29 essays (personal testimonies from activists) that bring together and entangle to emotional work of activism with a rational case for action on the climate emergency (Field Diary 03.06.19).

As Mitzi Jonelle Tan exhorts there are very serious reasons to be creative, as activism can be exhausting and dangerous:

Not only can climate emergency discourse particularly scientific and political discourse be opaque to many: with charts, statistics and journals but creative rebellions not only can evoke emotions, rather than the rationality, but can be more accessible to many and 'campaigning in more subtle ways, creative ways keeps us safe (Tan, 2021).

I have attended a range of XR activist training including training on how to design actions that are powerful and impactful. During the training a central message was how important emotional disruption, using emotion, sacrifice and feeling, was to gain attention and move the public and their consciousness. The training makes an explicit link between holding space, blocking something, disrupting, occupying a place and its emotional impact. The training demonstrates how purposeful XR is in seeking to use emotions, feelings and affect in all of its activities to make them impactful. The activist training highlighted five dimensions of emotion, feelings and affect that need to be understood and used in impactful radical activism.

Firstly, the training explained that because arrest is always a possibility for activists it draws attention to both the vulnerabilities and needs of other groups. XR activists

work with vulnerabilities as a creative tactic. Action design that causes disruption wakes people up, provokes a response and causes people to think about issues they are not familiar with.

Secondly, being involved in an action is likely to require some sacrifice. Activists showing that they are prepared to give something up, in order to demonstrate how they feel about the climate emergency, helps cut through the noise of competing opinions and emotions about action on climate change. The sacrifice may be an emotional sacrifice or something more practical such as losing one's liberty and being arrested.

Thirdly, the training stressed the importance of communicating respectfully with each other and with the public before the action and thinking through possible moments of confrontation and potential de-escalation tactics. Use of emotion during the actions was highlighted and discussed. For example, we explored the role anger, when controlled, played in motivating action and demonstrating the urgency and importance of action and change. We practised focusing and controlling anger whilst keeping one's temper and not losing it.

Fourthly, the training demonstrated the importance of embodiment of the message that you seek to present, including recognising that some of these powerful messages have moved people to tears. The training explains that the message must be delivered *through the gut not through the brain*, if it is to be intensely powerful and impossible to rationalise and ignore. Actions are about demanding a reaction and making waves or polarising opinion and this is not necessarily negative. Whether you love something or hate it, by people reacting they are acknowledging that it is real and tangible. That acknowledgement may be the first step to an open dialogue. Actions that are not just about placards or slogans, but embodied, can draw attention to hugely complex diffuse issues that are often *out there* rather than ever present. Embodiment helps to foreground concepts, ideas and issues that are not clearly visible, being thought provoking and emotional. Embodied actions that help someone step into the reality of the climate crisis and feel hope for a better future should be a key focus of action design. Embodied actions can summon emotions to demonstrate fear, identify grief and stimulate a hoping for a future we wish for.

Fifthly, the training on tactics encouraged actions that create a dilemma for the authorities using humour wherever possible. Fighting back at the state with humour, coined as *laughtivism*, works because nothing withers fear like a good laugh. The action design training pack gave an example of this *laughtivism*. In October 2019 the police decided to treat the giant pink fluffy non-binary octopus, named Jeanne-Luc, like a criminal and chased it down the street. At the time it made activists and the audience understand what was happening as slapstick comedy, it dissipated fear and emboldened the activists to take more action. Subsequently the recorded video went viral with over 2.7 million views.

Humour has a history in activism as a mobilising force, often used to disrupt creatively. There is a history of clowning as a tactic in activism (Routledge, 2017). Clowns can be political; they challenge authority and they borrow from other art forms to increase impact. Standing up to power clowns use humour and subversion, challenging through improvisation, ridicule and absurdity. During the October 2019 rebellion XR Rebel Clowns planted bulbs in the Vauxhall pleasure gardens. XR Rebel Clowns saw themselves as entertainers, educators and also as supporting a regenerative culture movement.

In summary, although XR activism disrupts as a core tactic, it does this non-violently seeking out embodied creative disruption to generate specific emotions. The level of thought and creativity XR activists employ in order to generate these specific emotions builds upon previous environmental activism tactics and repertoire but is more purposeful and dynamic.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined XR activism's use of emotions, feelings and affect, explored how they were generated or sustained and explored what they do. Emotions, feelings and affect are powerful forces in this contemporary environmental activism and have been consciously and purposely employed to mobilise XR activists, engage the public and challenge inertia of action on climate change. However, they are complex, interrelated and contextual and often considerably nuanced. Calls by scholars, identified earlier in this chapter, to unpack individual emotions to assess how motivating they may be to take political action may well be

misplaced given how contextually dependent and situationally specific their impact is.

One of the challenges facing those involved in environmental activism is that climate change is often temporally and spatially remote from the individual. As Anderson puts it, the environment is 'out there' rather than being 'around here' (2010, p. 974) Emotions helped XR activists to orientate themselves to the world in which we live, helped them to find out what they care about, value and what they are prepared to do about it. The stories XR activists tell play a critical role in mobilising and shaping emotions which in turn shape collective and individual actions. XR activists' emotions are collective and individual; they affect individual activist motivations, are shared, generated collectively and find targets and places in others and audiences. They can be short lived and intense as well as long lasting and deep seated.

XR activists seek to generate specific emotions and feelings and this focus may be more effective than just seeking to generate agency with general emotional responses. Grief powerfully connects bodies and allows imaginaries of how to value and represent the loss. It was often personal but inspires activists to live the loss. Mourning allowed activists to meet in a community and plan for action. Appeals to hope are widespread in XR's activism. I found no evidence that XR activists focus on hope or active hope, which was not about optimism, had any impact in lowering motivation to be involved in activism or urgency to engage in actions to mitigate the impact of climate change and the climate emergency. Anger, often associated with losing control of one's actions, was controlled and focused. There is little examination in the literature about the role of anger that is controlled and that which is out of control or uncontrollable. This control of, and losing control of anger, needs to be further examined and researched in social movements, particularly those that reject violence and are wedded to direct action that is always and exclusively nonviolent. An insistence and monitoring that actions must always be undertaken when free from illegal drugs and alcoholic substances allows the use of anger in control. This controlled anger is not negative, or irrational but productive, complicated, logical and purposeful.

Activists who focus anger on specific objects and can control this focus can demonstrate a powerful collective demand for climate justice, rather than giving expression to deep seated prejudice. It is activists' anger that is controlled and focused that is a bedfellow of hope. Collectively pride created belonging, solidarity, comradeship and a sense that as activists together were part of something which was greater than themselves. Using Emerick's (2021) three accounts of how activists appeal to love as a remedy for injustice I found that: Generally, XR activists use the union of love to seek to widen, as far as possible, who and what is included in the *we* and the *us* of environmental activism. The union account of love extends the boundaries of love, creating love for people whom you may never have met or never will meet. Some sections of XR, such as XR Faith centre the sentimentalist account of love and love as fate. These activists' appeals to love were used as a counterweight to the potential fractionalisation of movements identified by Saunders.

We should therefore challenge the assumption that collective identity always has a binding effect on movements. To the contrary, it has the potential to dangerously fractionalize movements (Saunders, 2008, p. 250).

There are risks in seeking to achieve change by evoking powerful emotions. Invoking vulnerability surfaces the everyday and the immediate but rather than engendering in activists feelings of weakness, it engaged them in taking more actions and risk, accepting a potentially higher personal cost. It also made activists more resilient. When talking about vulnerability activists would often draw on previous experiences of how they had felt vulnerable which made actions more purposeful.

Affect is a vital sensation in this contemporary street activism of XR, which is difficult to describe, but noticeable in shading and shaping how emotions develop, circulate and are sustained through bodies in the actions. Affect was palpable as activists occupied, chanted and engaged audiences or were arrested in waves by the police. It was present in shaping creative performance as the Petri dish for feelings and emotions to achieve change. The affectual memories of action are not just remembered in the mind but also in the bodies, both the human and more than human. They were enmeshed and entangled, being held together in a place, being affected, as well as affecting audiences, the state actors and activists.

Feelings were an important feature of XR's activism. Acknowledging feelings firstly to ourselves, then to one another and then putting them on show through emotions makes actions more robust and impactful. Embodying emotions in actions was a key strategy, tactic and repertoire of XR activism. Similar actions generated different emotions and therefore, what is intended, experienced and how it is interpreted was contextual. Activists often could identify a range of interconnected emotions and feelings which they felt drove them to more comprehensive and purposeful actions. For example, when feelings of hope were given proximity with grief, activists felt a greater sense of commitment and urgency for taking action on climate change. Some scholars identify when analysing the role of emotions in activism some as positive, motivating participation and action, others as negative which reduces it. However, XR activists do not judge any emotion as bad, welcoming them all as useful tools if used well.

Emotion counteracts, what Anderson calls, *zombie environmentalism* and its proximity to a development oriented culture, climate change denial and doom and gloom and allows the emergence and practice of a *coyote environmentalism* with its embodiment of 'conflicts, problems solutions and possibilities' (2010, p. 974). Coyote environmentalisms, like emotions, are never absolutely consistent and pure, but entangled, complex, inconsistent and like XR seek to find solutions without blaming or shaming. XR's tactics of using emotions create tensions, unsettle assumptions and debates because the approach upset peoples' frames of reference and perception about how things should be. Sometimes the challenge by XR to others who had different views made them angry and scared, but almost always got a reaction.

What is clear from the research is that specific emotions cannot be directly correlated to specific interpretations, behaviours, actions or outcomes. They act and interact in complex ways. However, it is clear that they do shape how activists engage and see the world around them which feeds back into how they describe themselves, their place in activism and the stories they tell. Activists also described how their life experiences and personality shaped the activism they performed. These are insights may have implications not just for activists but anyone seeking to

engage people in social change. Finally, this research demonstrates again how protest helps activists feel good about themselves and others. Although there are risks and activism can be painful, it is also often uplifting and exciting. Sometimes at the same time. Activism can make you feel alive. It gives you agency. It makes you feel 'you have got skin in the game'; 'Again and again, acts of government repression inspire mass mobilisation' (Jasper, 2007, p. 74).

Chapter 7

Language

XR Pic 'n' mix (a day of training and workshops)

Went to the London coordinating group. Explored reasons for local XR groups. Local XR communities close to the action allow XR to frame the climate emergency in ways relevant to those local communities. The climate emergency, rather than climate change, I now hear everywhere. I can't remember hearing it said anywhere before the Easter rebellion. XR Tower Hamlets was focused on air quality, one of the major local public health issues locally and intertwined with transport, fossil fuels and climate change. To allow people who are excluded to express their activism in other ways, protest is called a *street meet*. I am told that some cultures are not happy to dance in the street. (Field Diary 11.05.19).



Figure 16: Banners at Marsham street (Source author).

Since XR activists started intensive public activisms at the end of 2018 there has been a sea change in the UK in the discourse about increased levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, its impact on the human and non-human, the urgency with which it needs to be addressed, and the language used to describe this phenomenon. I argue in this chapter that XR activisms have played an important role in this changed narrative with environmental problems now often framed and using language that XR activists have sought to promote. This chapter examines how XR activists have sought to reframe the debate about climate change. I briefly review the literature on framing in this chapter to contextualise an examination of what efforts XR activists have made to frame their activism, how framing is used and what it does. I then examine Jasper et al.'s concept of *characters* and its usefulness in

understanding the framing of social movements. I then consider the language XR activists use in talking about anthropogenic changes to the environment and how it tries to focus public and government attention on how urgent the action required is and who is responsible for the climate emergency. Using the cultural perspective of framing I examine XR activism to understand what is a continuity with UK environmental activism and what is new or different. First, as in other chapters, a personal story to surface my positionality on these issues.

A personal story

I have been on the board of a number of charities as a trustee over the years. Very often they have had charitable purposes not only to provide practical support to their service users but also to campaign and reframe how their client group was perceived by others. The first charity I was on the board of was Lambeth Aids Action, which provided services to people with AIDS and HIV, including day services at a centre called The Landmark. At the time many service users were described in the press as *AIDS victims* or *AIDS sufferers* rather than people living with HIV. What you name something, what you call it, what you call someone, matters and often means you behave differently. Princess Diana officially opened The Landmark for us. I took my mum. She was overjoyed to meet the Princess and she still has a picture of when she met her on her wall. It struck me at the time, and more so upon reflection, that what Princess Diana had managed to do by holding hands and cuddling people living with HIV was to completely reframe who they were and how they were treated by large sections of society almost overnight. It was quite remarkable. I became friendly with quite a few people with HIV over those years. I can remember going to a slap-up meal with Alan and a group of his friends two weeks before we lost him. *Lost*, what a funny word. He wasn't lost: he died. It was tragic, he was 28 and full of life, even in death. A lot of people who had become my friends during these years, mainly gay men, died. I went to lots of funerals. Why do we use words and expressions that downplay or diminish what's really happening? I think using language that reflects your reality allows you to engage more with it emotionally and make a difference.

Until a few years ago I chaired a charity that provided services and campaigned for people with autism. In 2009 I met Michael Barton who gave me a signed copy of his

book *It's raining cats and dogs: looking into the minds of people on the autistic spectrum*. It helped me understand how important language is if you are someone who takes things very literally, as many people with autism do. Again, our clients were not a medical condition such as *Asperger syndrome*, they didn't have a *disorder*, they were people first. We are all somewhere on the spectrum! These experiences, and others, mean that I understand the importance of how you frame something. What you call it changes what you then do and how you then live. Using a different narrative can change people's lives. There is no pride on a dead planet!

What does all this mean?

Many social movements attempt to change the framing and language used to describe and understand their activism using emotional, rational, and ideological processes (Adams, 2002). Framing is the way in which 'individuals and groups identify, interpret and express social and political grievances' (Taylor, 2000, p. 511). Activisms by attempting to frame who they are and what they do are 'engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for protagonists, antagonists and bystanders' (Snow, 2004, p. 384). Snow et al (2004) refer to the signifying work or meaning construction engaged in by activists and their participants, as well as their antagonists, the elites, the media, and counter movements to promote their interests and support the challenges they make. The purpose is to mobilise activists, build public support and disempower or demobilise antagonists. Snow (2004) describes this framing process as building *collective action frames*. The creation of a frame focuses attention on what activists believe is important and relevant, leaving aside that which is less important, irrelevant and *out of frame*. It seeks to provide a lens for others to see the world and to present the meaning activists wish others to draw from activities, actions, processes and objects. However, more than seeking to present their version of *what is going on here?*, they also seek to 'activate adherents, transform bystanders into supporters, exact concessions from targets, and demobilise antagonists' (Snow, 2004, p. 385). To be effective at framing, activists need to be cognisant of the culture and political context within which they are seeking to change the understanding of meaning or create new meanings.

Characters

Jasper et al. (2018) highlight that social movements work extensively to promote their preferred character and reputation in strategic arenas. Their opponents often seek to resist these claims and paint different pictures of the activists and themselves. Jasper et al. (2018) argue that how social movements and their opponents use *characters* has been overlooked but helps to expose the dilemmas that both face as they try to influence reputations. This *character work* seeks to challenge the activists underlying motivation, their tactics and their lack of sophistication of understanding the facts or feasibility of change to meet the activists objectives in the *real world*. It seeks to take complexity out of the social world, primarily identifying people and organisations as heroes, villains, victims, or minions. Heroes are good and strong, villains malevolent and powerful, victims deserve our sympathy and perhaps help but are weak and minions are weak, threatening and subservient to villainous causes.

Police officials justify surveillance on the grounds that environmental, anti-fracking, animal-protectionist and related activists are radical extremists, outside agitators, dangerous mobs, conspiratorial, and yet also silly and naive. Part villain, part minion: dangerous enough to justify police funding, but too silly to have their ideas taken seriously, like dangerous animals (Jasper et al., 2018, p. 128).

One of the reasons that climate change deniers use these tactics is that often when we are making decisions we look as much at who is giving the message as what the message says. If we need to make judgments on issues that are outside of our immediate knowledge, trust becomes important with the communicator being at least as important, and sometimes more important, than the message. This character work theory appears to have some merit in explaining why XR activists are framed by opponents to identify the movement as extremist, malevolent, silly and naïve. This was examined in detail in chapter three on environmental activism histories when reviewing the extent that XR activists are stereotyped. In addition, this concept helps to expose the tension and dilemmas XR activists have faced in communicating complex future concerns with difficulties and trade-offs and a tendency for simplification and character work in the way that the world can be understood. I

explore the tension between messages and framing that is simple and that which seeks to communicate and broaden understanding of complexity later in this chapter.

Language

Language is an important part of activist movements (Jasper, 2017) and in this section I examine how XR activists have used it to further their activism and the impact it has had.

At Westminster Magistrates Court to support 17 arrestees on their first court appearances. One of the rebels was autistic and had a friend. Despite the prosecutor trying to persuade the District Judge that all should have conditions on bail they were all released on conditional bail and pleaded not guilty. The District Judge repeats the activists description of climate change as a climate emergency in his summing up of the case and evidence. A reporter from the sun was in the public gallery all day listening to proceedings. No one hears you unless you stand in the middle of the road and shout emergency, emergency, emergency!. The framing used by XR is creating a debate and tensions that are new and different. It is almost as if people on different sides of the debate are scared angry because the approach upsets their frame of reference and perception about how things should be. Why should being polite and friendly make someone scared and angry? (Field Diary 20.05.19).

Since the declaration of rebellion in October 2018, XR activists have actively sought to change the language used in the framing of the debate about anthropogenic climate change and ecological degradation. The name of the movement, Extinction Rebellion, encapsulates that change; it is an active name which describes a movement that is different in tone to long standing environmental organisations such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, or the World Wildlife Fund. The XR symbol is a circle around an hourglass. The circle represents the planet earth, and the stylised hourglass is a warning that time is running out for climate for action on climate change.

On the first day of XR's *rebellion* in October 2018 non-violent direct action commenced with fifteen rebels arrested for sitting down in the road and refusing to move. They chanted about *extinction*, *ecological collapse*, and *ecocide*. XR press releases, e-mails and letters were signed off with *Love and Rage*. In December 2018

XR activists focused on the mainstream media's language and framing with actions targeting buildings occupied by The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The actions were to protest about the nature of the BBC's reporting of anthropogenic climate change and its consequences and demand that the BBC *Tell the truth* about climate change, use language commensurate with the scale of the problem, give greater coverage based on climate change science, and avoid *false balance*. This challenge had immediate impacts on politicians, many of whom adopted some of XR activists' language. For example, on Wednesday 24 April 2019 (Day ten of the Easter rebellion) Diane Abbott, the then Shadow Home Secretary and MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, came out of Parliament to speak to her constituents and other members of Hackney XR. She stood under a banner demanding a citizen's assembly NOW! In parliament square.

I am here to speak to anybody that wants to be in dialogue with me. I thought I would come out and rather than making a big speech as politicians do I would take some questions. But first let me say I think you have done an amazing job drawing people's attention to the climate emergency. I also say in all the noise of Brexit the climate emergency is the most important issue facing us. I was very pleased to be in the room listening to our comrade Greta Thunberg yesterday she was amazing. (Extract from a speech by Diane Abbott to Hackney XR recorded in Field Diary 24.04.2019)

In her address she had already adopted the language of *climate emergency* and *telling the truth* about climate change, which is language that she was not using ten days earlier. The UK Government, following a vote in Parliament on Wednesday 1 May 2019, declared an environmental and climate emergency and thousands of other national and local administrations and organisations have followed with their own declarations (Climate Emergency UK, 2020). Analysis of scrapings from the Twitter accounts, before and after this period, of the major UK environmental organisations and local environmental organisations in Sheffield demonstrate that the language and framing they used progressively mirrored that of XR. For example, Figure 17 below is a word cloud generated from Friends of the Earth tweets in 2018 and Figure 18 is a word cloud generated, over a year later, from combining tweets of five environmental organisations (including Friends of the Earth UK) in the last week of April 2019 and after the XR Easter uprising.

breakdown instead of climate change.... Use climate science denier or climate denier instead of climate sceptic (The Guardian, 2019).

These examples demonstrate how these climate activists relatively quickly and significantly influenced the language used in framing of the discourse both locally and nationally by politicians and the media. However, this language and framing has had long lasting effects on political, environmental as well as individual conversations, provoking debate at different scales and in different places (BBC Radio 4, 2020) (The Guardian, 2019).

Framing

XR activists intentionally and purposefully seek to frame discourse and I have not observed this level of intentionality and purposefulness in framing by other *radical* environmentalisms. XR activists undertake training to promote powerful and consistent framing by them and adoption of these frames by others. XR activists seek to identify those aspects they want *in frame* and those they want *out of frame*.

XR DNA training today at the Camden food bank today. We discussed the framing that Extinction Rebellion wants and what framing it is seeking to avoid. The framing XR is seeking to adopt and promote around its actions and about environmental/climate crises is: Non-violent, protects nature (not just animal rights), is respectful and bold, promotes urgent action on climate change: It's an emergency that requires some system change, improvements in democracy, It values community and needs all of us together to seek climate justice for all. We should all seek to avoid any framing that paints us as anarchist, lefty, about animal rights, about personal rather than system change. XR is not here to provide the solution; it's not a *solutioneer* and it's not about individual lifestyle changes (Field Diary 18.01.2020).

I now examine the frames XR activists seek to promote and develop using Snow et al.'s conceptual architecture on framing which collectively they describe as 'the production of mobilising and counter-mobilising meanings and ideas' (2019, p. 405). These conceptions are collective action frames, master frames, diagnostic frames, prognostic frames, motivational frames and frame articulation and elaboration.

XR activists collective action frame is to tell the truth about climate change and biodiversity loss, to act now and move beyond politics⁴⁹, listening to the science. This overall master frame appeals for climate justice and environmental justice.

The chant starts... What do we want? Climate justice... When do we want it?..... Now! (Field Diary 15.04.2019).

This master frame has become more visible as the activists have grown and developed.

master frames become increasingly important as the scale of protest and mobilisation expands to involve coalitions of groups and movement organisations, as with the recent globalisation or trans nationalisation of protest (Snow, 2004, p. 405).

XR activists frame climate justice in three ways. Firstly, as a concern with the world's poorest people in the majority world who are least able to cope with climate induced extreme weather events and other climate change consequences. Secondly, those who are most vulnerable and are unable to procedurally get their voice heard or hold those responsible to account. Lastly, those with the biggest stake in positive environmental outcomes are granted the least opportunity to be heard and their communities' interests and positions recognised. In addition, XR activists focus on the frame of climate change vulnerability rather than climate change resilience or climate change adaptation as being a more useful or appropriate response to the climate emergency.

The literature suggests that vulnerability is distributed differentially not only across communities, nations, and regions, but also across races, ethnicities, ages, classes, income levels, occupation, and genders (Burnham, et al., 2013, p. 243).

XR activists diagnostic framing is that the use of fossil fuels leads to climate change, extreme weather events and the loss of biodiversity. This framing is targeted at authorities, political decision-making and policy makers. Responsibility for not reducing fossil fuel use rests with governments and transnational corporations and

⁴⁹ Now rebranded as *Be the change*

they are the ones who need to take action. This is an injustice to the majority world with those generally most affected benefiting the least from activities that create CO₂ and the climate emergency. XR activists encourage anyone able to act to do so and against these institutions.

XR activists seek to contest the individualisation of environmental problems and solutions, whilst not negating the importance of living the life you believe in. Although XR activists promote that we should all start *being the change*, this is not blaming or shaming individuals for the climate emergency and therefore a less oppositional framing of climate breakdown than other environmentalisms. Climate change deniers and transnational oil companies often have sought to frame climate change as an issue to do with individual consumer choices, reminding people that they are dependent upon fossil fuel and the impacts of that dependence are not primarily the companies' fault. Shell promotes that consumers should *to do their part* and BP famously invented the ultimate tool for focusing on individual rather than collective responsibilities for the climate emergency by developing the carbon footprint calculator.

XR activists' prognostic framing is to act now to stop burning fossil fuels and move to net zero emission of greenhouse gases without being prescriptive or sign posting what the solutions might be, other than exhorting that actions should follow the science. The motivational framing is that this is an emergency in which action needs to be taken now by governments and transnational corporations, using emotions as a central feature, as I examined in the previous chapter. Frame articulation is the connection and coordination of experiences, events and strands, so that they come together in a relatively integrated and meaningful way to present a coherent story to audiences. Frame elaboration is a process in which some beliefs and events are foregrounded, in contrast to others, as the most salient issues the activists want to promote. XR activists frame articulation and elaboration splices together a range of activist topic strands linking, burning fossil fuels, the fashion industry, flying, and intensive farming practices. It links together the climate emergency, sea level rise, biodiversity loss and extreme weather events as a frame articulation and elaboration and presents future catastrophes as necessitating action in the present. Bringing the *out there* tomorrow to *in here* today. As we have examined in previous chapters XR

activisms has recruited activists from across the generations, many new to activism (Saunders, et al., 2020), with messages that identify impacts and costs for future generations if action is not undertaken now.

In considering what successful framing may be and what it looks like Markowitz and Shariff (2012) identify six psychological framing strategies to bolster the recognition of climate change as a moral imperative and a call to action. I now use these six psychological framing strategies as an assessment tool to evaluate XR activists framing endeavours. Firstly, they suggest framing climate change using more broadly held values that appeal to unmobilised demographics. XR activists sign up to a clear set of broad-based values, that I have explored in previous chapters, and has successfully mobilised people to become active for the first time. Secondly, they propose focusing messaging on the costs, not benefits, that we may impose on future generations. Focusing on the costs to future generations of the climate emergency, as we have seen in chapter five, is a cornerstone of XR activist framing and strategy. Thirdly, Markowitz and Shariff (2012) suggest motivating action through emotions such as appeals to hope, pride and gratitude rather than guilt, shame and anxiety. XR activists purposefully uses emotion as a mobilising strategy with appeals to hope, pride and love which was examined in some detail in chapter six. Fourthly, they identify that suggesting action on climate change as good business may be counterproductive. XR activists challenge a *business-as-usual* model and stress vulnerability rather than promoting an appropriate response as primarily climate change resilience or adaption. Fifthly, they put forward increasing the identification with the empathy for future generations and people living in other places. XR activists use a master frame of climate and environmental justice which identifies vulnerabilities in the majority world, but also elsewhere. Lastly, they suggest the use of social influence and appeals to human desires for approval. XR activists extensively use social media to frame their activism and mobilise for action but has a more nuanced approach to *approval* by promoting us all to *be the change*.

XR activists framing of language and discourse has sought to promote simple objectives and messaging. For example, the framing of climate change as an *emergency* now has resonance but this simple framing then also has the capacity to limit discourse and a focus on solutions that might be messy. Criticisms of XR and its

framing and analysis of causes and possible solutions to climate change, which have been examined in previous chapters, surface the tensions between complicated, deep dive and detailed analysis and the difficulty of communicating this effectively to decision makers and the wider population. Purposefully framing language and discourse in order to be simple and demand attention, crowds out the space to have more nuanced conversations about difference and less space for solutions.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have briefly explored efforts XR activists have made to frame its activism, how framing is used and what it does. XR activists use language and framing, invoking the scientific and the rational, seeking to evoke specific emotions as a response. They seek to frame, rename and reclaim climate and ecological change from a frame of being, an inevitable but manageable result of human activities, to needing an emergency response and catastrophic for human and nonhuman. Framing is not unusual for environmental activism but XR activists framing has an unusual intentionality and purposefulness with evidence that it has impacted on climate change discourse in different spatialities and temporalities. XR activists framing, symbols, language and discourses demanded attention and response from authorities and have also recruited, retained, mobilised and motivated activists.

So how does this research and the analysis of XR activism and use of framing shape, inform and build upon the long standing theory of framing and its application within activism? Firstly, this research and analysis of XR activists framing in language and discourse and the different elements of this environmental movement concludes that framing theory is still remarkably informative in understanding this contemporary environmental activism. Secondly, it draws our attention to the tension between framing that seeks simplicity and clear messaging and that which seeks to promote and explain complexity. It demonstrates that there is a power and effectiveness in simple messaging and framing which encourages focus and action, which is often considered vital for effective activism. However, avoiding complex framing due to concerns that it may confuse and disempower, can limit the understandings of the complexity and interconnectedness of issues and ideas where solutions may also be complicated and messy. This research infers that XR activists'

framing disseminated clear messages and changed language and discourse, but they could have promoted other frames which may have included solutions which in turn may have signposted clearer trajectories for taking action on the climate emergency and biodiversity loss.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

As I sit here taking in the latest sculpture on the Trafalgar Square's fourth plinth it seems now would be a good time to take stock. I remember Heather Phillipson being interviewed about her dystopian artwork which is a swirl of cream with a cherry, a drone and a fly. She said it was meant to reflect Trafalgar Square as a site of celebration and protest which it shared with other forms of life. She said that conceptually it was about something being on the verge of collapse, but it was meant to be hopeful, signalling a chance for radical change. I take a picture of it on my phone. This will probably be the last day of taking action for a while but it's good to get back on the streets after the lockdowns. I think about what I want to write about. I need to communicate how tiring and emotional activism is. I've taken action with some courageous, wonderful and inspiring people, young and old. The places we have taken action have been changed and have changed me. XR is new, changing, emerging, developing, but had amazing impact over the last few years in changing how the climate crisis is noticed and conceived, but not yet in the UK led to the radical environmental action required to shift/motivate governments. That seems about it (Field Diary 04.09.2020)



Figure19: The swirl of cream on the fourth plinth at Trafalgar Square, London (Source author).

This final chapter reviews the extent to which the overall research aims and four research objectives of this project have been met. It then reviews the main research findings focusing in turn on empirical findings, methodological findings and conceptual findings. It then examines, in the light of these findings and the research

outcomes, what opportunities there may be for further research. I then consider the implications of the research for others, including XR activists, other activists, the government and academia. In this penultimate section I make observations on XR activists and protest and the law in the light of how the state, police, courts and the public have responded to its actions. Finally, there are then some concluding remarks.

Research Questions

The aim of this research was to examine how people in the UK become mobilised about environmental issues by examining key dimensions of XR's radical contemporary British environmental activists in London and how these dimensions are made and sustained. Below I review the four research questions, the extent to which they were examined, the research objectives met and the research questions answered.

- **RO1** *To document, explore and understand the radical environmentalisms of Extinction Rebellion from the perspective of a borough-based group and an affinity group in London, contextualised within the UK's history of environmentalisms, highlighting its spatial practises.*

This research identifies that these XR radical activists may be best understood in the context of the histories and trajectories of UK environmental activists. XR radical activists and their continuity or newness is not visible unless it is examined in this context. It is possible to identify strands and traces of these historical radical UK environmentalisms, that has been developing over the last fifty years, in most aspects of XR's activists strategy, tactics repertoires and practises. The research identified eight key features of historical environmental activism to assess these XR's activists' continuity or newness.

First, there has been a continuing tension between reformist and radical environmentalisms. XR activists high profile and immediate impacts made it visible and therefore subject to scrutiny by other radical organisations who have concerns that it is not broad based and radical enough. In large part this is because XR's activists foreground environmental and social problems but do not identify or

surface what the fundamental or systemic causes of these problems may be and consciously avoid promoting any particular solutions.

Secondly, XR activists have been subject to radical activist stereotyping in similar ways to previous environmentalisms by opponents, the government and conservative media. However, this research demonstrates that XR activists are committed to non-violence from across the generations taking action together. Some are *re-energised* activists but most activists were new to radical activism with important concerns that now motivate them to take action.

Thirdly, environmentalisms have always operated across scales, expressing activism locally, regionally and nationally. The climate emergency is a planet wide problem, although its impacts are temporally and spatially different. XR activists have used tactics to make this *out there* universal problem a local and visible one in the present, by purposely using creative actions in chosen places to generate specific emotions.

Fourthly, there is a tradition in UK environmentalisms of activists having a range of topics of concern which ebb and flow and evolve but are often a rearticulation of existing concerns in new language and terms. XR activism recognises this and incorporates opportunities to express a wide range of topics of concern into its organisational design and activist practices.

Fifthly, XR founding activists consciously developed its activism as a *banner* under which people who had different concerns about different topics could come together. This allows activists to take action under the same banner with activists of difference separately and together. XR activism has attracted activists of difference, but like previous environmentalisms they have continued to be concerned about diversity and difference. Despite being founded by a largely white, middle class leadership group XR activists have continued to strive to make people of colour and those from working class backgrounds visible in its activism particularly its leadership. In addition, many local XR groups have reached out to ensure that their activism encourage a just transition and prioritise voices of those disproportionately harmed by systemic racial and social injustice.

Sixthly, environmental organisations and movements develop, grow and are sustained but are eventually diminished or disappear. XR's activisms are unique in that they have taken place before, during and after a global pandemic. It emerged quickly into social spaces, but it is difficult to predict how it will now develop in the longer term, not least because of the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic dominated social and legacy media for a year and a half, crowding out other important issues with lockdowns and other restrictions repressing in-person spatial activism. Other radical environmental groups such as Insulate Britain or Just Stop Oil have more recently emerged and grabbed media interest and headlines.

Environmental activisms often use the tactics and repertoires tried, demonstrated and practised in the past. XR activisms have demonstrated a blending and adaptation from previous environmental reformist and radical social movements. It has exhibited the use of tactics and repertoires usually only found in reformist environmental activisms and repurposed them for use in their radical activisms. Features of these XR's activisms that demonstrate a newness in *radical* environmental activism are a clear and published set of aims, objectives, principle and values with and espoused vision, a direct challenge to government, the level of disruption given its non-violence, the number of activists arrested in short periods of time, its focus on a regenerative culture to allow activists to recover and renew and its purposefulness and intensity when on the streets of London or other organising spaces. In addition, XR activists use many aspects of place to intensify and make visible their activisms and purposefully use public appeals to evoke very specific emotions.

XR activisms appeared to come out of nowhere and have had the ability to reach across generations and have impact in the way that mass trespass and climate camps did not. It took XR activists about six months to develop a level of mobilisation that anti roadbuilding activists took approaching a decade to achieve. Within two years climate change went from being an issue that some people were passively concerned about to one which many worried about and demanded government action. This research identifies that this was because XR activisms were built on the long history of UK environmental activisms, exploiting existing networks such as

Rising Up! and as a push/pull response to members of older movements who had become less radical and institutionalised.

• **RO2** *To consider what impact these activist practices have at multiple scales and in multiple ways.*

Human Geographers' understanding of activism often uses the conceptual lenses of spatiality and place and starts from a perspective of noticing and examining difference as well as sociocultural dimensions such as age, generations, emotions, feelings and affect. Spatiality in environmental activism is a key component in its understanding because the global nature of the climate emergency informs how differently scaled activism are understood and seen as legitimate or otherwise. It helps to identify, despite this global nature of concerns, why activism and protests are at particular places, why these places are chosen, and what these places do. Geographers of social change add spatiality and place in particular to the analysis and understanding of social manifestations and social change. In addition, geography helps us to understand the complexity of these spatialities. This research examines the important difference in different understandings of the complexity of spatiality by engaging the concept of place. This allowed an examination of the place/activism entanglement and how places are used to sustain activism.

This involved firstly examining how meaning was created from and at the place of protest, then the role of protest camps in these activism. Thirdly how these activists used places as territory and what this did. Fourthly, the place of performance, art and music in XR's activism and action design. Fifthly, how place was used as a spatial strategy. Sixthly, how memories were intertwined with these activism and place. Seventhly how these XR activism use the sense of being *in* place or *out* of place to produce more powerful activism and lastly how social media and smartphones now need to be understood as integral and intertwined with place to analyse this activism/social media entanglement.

This research identifies why these activism and protests were in certain places and what this did. A focus on place changes our understanding of activism. Activists in choosing places make messages more tangible to local and wider audiences.

Activisms always has a spatial context and the performance of activism was different in different places with the place chosen informing its visibility and impact. XR activists demonstrate that they are never only local, regional, national or global. They are completely interconnected, and these scales are interdependent. XR activists, by using place productively, facilitated rebels with a wide range of concerns to come together in one place to take action. They purposefully entangled place with their activism to move people to action across difference. XR's activists use of place demonstrated the importance of mobile spatial strategies with place and activism creating and shaping each other. Protest created meaning from that place and creating this meaning sustained activists during long periods. Understanding how and why activists use place is significant and important. For example, by asserting ownership of places, rather than capture or tenancy, many of these activists felt powerful and legitimate. It created a sense of identity, that these were *my streets* and *my place*, and exploited the potential of organising spaces.

• **RO3** *To identify examine and understand how people of different generations are involved in and use these activist practices and how this helped them to cohere and create solidarity.*

This research objective pursued investigating how different generations became active under the banner of XR, rather than examining the full range of differences and diversities that are present in society and activism. It has identified that a broad range of generations are now part of this contemporary environmental activism and understanding and appreciating difference in generations helps explain and inform what activities and actions these activists are prepared and able to take. It has identified that active youth climate activism often undertakes actions with less risk of arrest using non-violent tactics, recognising what they have to lose and demanding a different future. Older generations often expressed their activism differently as fighting for a future for their children or grandchildren, nieces or nephews. It identifies generations as a key dimension of difference but one that was part of developing activist solidarity in this contemporary activism. Although there were some tensions and conflicts between generations it was noticeable how frequently activists of different generations became active in the same space, often together. XR activists were shaped by how activists defined and placed themselves in a particular

generation and how they perceived other activists to be part of their generation or a member of another. This difference informs and shaped these activists' identities which often involved storytelling about lifecourse. It also identifies how this difference becomes a powerful driver in mobilising activists and how entanglements and intersections with nature and the anthropocene give different but important insights. For example, people of faith often had a concept of nature, that having been created by God, needed to be respected and protected with their activism shaped by a vulnerability that they often described as sacrifice.

What is clear from this research is that this contemporary environmental activism is a multi-generational and intergenerational endeavour. It highlights how geography rarely examines the interconnectedness of generations. In society power relations between different generations can be fluid. For example, young people caring for parents or older relatives shifts power relations between age groups. When examining the power relations between different generations in this activism we notice that they are fluid and related to the type and nature of actions undertaken and which generations take risks to promote their activism. This research demonstrates that in this XR activism when generational positions are paid attention to and examined, additional insights such as how intergenerational solidarity develops and what it does are exposed. It identifies the importance of intergenerational conversations which can overcome difference across those generations but also that employing eldership can make activism more impactful.

• **RO4** *To explore how emotions, feelings and affect are generated and entangled with activist practices at different spatialities and establish what they do.*

Emotions, feelings and affect are powerful forces in this contemporary environmental activism and have been consciously and purposely employed to mobilise XR activists, engage the public and challenge inertia of action on climate change. However, they are complex, interrelated and contextual and often considerably nuanced. Chapter six examines the emotional attachment of activists to particular places, how this can make activism more visible and impactful and how emotions are used to sustain their activism. It examines how emotions help address one of the challenges facing those involved in environmental activism in that climate change is

often temporally and spatially remote from the individual. Emotions helped these XR activists to orientate themselves to the world in which they lived, helped them find out what they cared about valued and what they're prepared to do about it. Embodying emotions, and locating them spatially in actions, is a key strategy, tactic and repertoire of these XR activists. For example, the use of the *death march* in urban spaces and places demonstrated the power of grief as an activist emotion in those undertaking their practises of everyday life and changing activist and audience. It identified how by activists taking to the streets and undertaking performance they gave grief a space to be seen, demonstrated and witnessed. Feelings were an important feature of XR's activism. Acknowledging feelings firstly to ourselves, then to one another and then putting them on show through emotions makes actions more robust and impactful. Activists often could identify a range of interconnected emotions and feelings which they felt drove them to more comprehensive and purposeful actions. For example, when feelings of hope were given propinquity with grief, activists felt a greater sense of commitment and urgency for taking action on climate change. Affect was a vital sensation in this contemporary street activism of XR, which is difficult to describe, but noticeable in shading and shaping how emotions develop, circulate and are sustained through bodies in the actions. Affect was palpable as activists occupied, chanted and engaged audiences or were arrested in waves by the police. It was present in shaping creative performance as the Petri dish for feelings and emotions to achieve change.

Main research findings

This section summarises what we now know about XR activism as a result of this research. It then summarises the methodological learning during this activist participatory research which led to understandings about *activism from below*, noticing *patterns of serendipity* which allowed activism to develop, and finally proposes *activist smartphone doings* as a method and process for activist research on the move. Finally, it briefly explores the concepts used in this research and the resultant conceptual learning.

Empirical findings

XR in London was a contemporary manifestation of dynamic, reflexive, purposeful and intensive, radical environmentalisms whose threads are discernible in the

development of UK environmentalisms since the 1960's. For example, it built its activism understanding the significance of place and is very reflexive about emotions. XR have learnt and understood the lessons of previous environmentalisms and built and developed an organisation from that learning. It continues to be an evolving, sentient organisation evidenced by how it has changed during the relatively short period that I have been undertaking this research. Previous environmentalisms often expanded and developed by doing more of the same. For example, the climate camp movement developed more camps whereas XR's protest camps were strategically positioned and predominantly central to sustaining and nurturing this activism rather than predominantly prefigurative or a place of protest. As identified in chapter four, during rebellions without these camps it would not have been possible to have undertaken such sustained and intense actions in many different places over many days with so many rebels from different parts of the country.

My research has identified that these XR activisms are an unusual type of radical environmental grouping in at least eight ways. Firstly, unlike EF! it articulates its demands as a direct challenge to the government to change its policy. Secondly, it seeks to recruit a large number of activists from a wide range of backgrounds with different beliefs. Thirdly, it seeks to disrupt and resist with its actions being sustained and revitalised because it captures public attention and influences public discourse. However, XR recognises the role played by both exhaustion and personal tensions in the decline of social movements and has therefore built into its principles and values the support for a regenerative culture that is *healthy resilient and adaptable* as well avoiding *blaming and shaming* with organisational mechanisms to resolve disputes and learn from mistakes. Fourthly, a sophisticated approach to media management may be noticeable in large reformist environmental organisations but XR's level of sophistication is unusual in relation to UK radical activist environmental movements. XR developed a sophisticated fifty page design guide to allow diverse decentralised actions to take place whilst at the same time seeking to be understood as a single movement. Fifthly, XR has created an environment in which different generations are part of the one movement taking action together and developing generational solidarity. Sixthly, XR purposely and intensively uses and appeals to emotions, feelings and affect. This is examined in detail in chapter six. Some literature argues that some emotions intensify activisms, some diminish it and have

different temporalities (Goodwin and James, 2007; Kleres and Asa, 2017). That literature encourages the assessment of individual emotions to establish how motivating they may be to take political action. This research suggests this may be misplaced given how contextually dependent and situationally specific emotions in activism are in their effect. XR welcomes all emotions. Grief connects you with your body and allows imaginaries of how to value and represent the loss. Mourning allows activists to meet in a community and plan for action. Anger that is purposeful and focused is welcomed because it can motivate pro social action. This anger is as powerful and disarming as hope and can connect with what it is to care and be human. In an organisation such as XR whose fundamental demand is for climate justice; anger will always therefore have an important role. Generally, XR activists use the union account of love⁵⁰ to seek to widen as far as possible who and what is included in the *we* and the *us* of environmental activism. Although activist love may come upon you suddenly it is often constructed overtime. XR's training demonstrates how purposeful it is in seeking to use emotions, feelings and affect in all of its activities to make them impactful. Seventhly, XR creatively employs performance and art in order to generate specific emotions building upon previous environmental activists' tactics and repertoire, but it is significantly more purposeful and dynamic. This power comes from generating specific emotions, creating and engaging audiences, with the nature of the performance and art tailored to the target of that specific action or protest. For example, creating a *Lung* dance when focusing on air pollution, The *Landing Crew* performances focused on air travel with distinctive visual symbols and sounds. Lastly, XR activists intentionally and purposefully seek to frame discourse. Framing is not unusual for activists but XR's framing has an unusual intentionality and purposefulness with evidence that it has impacted on climate change discourse in different spatialities and temporalities. For example, XR in framing that urgent action is required now to halt climate change and biodiversity degradation has promoted the concept of *emergency* with discourse about using *climate emergency* now being commonplace. XR's framing, symbols, language and discourses demanded attention and response from authorities and have also recruited, retained, mobilised and motivated activists.

⁵⁰ Emerick (2021) analyses the relationship between love and activism and identifies three accounts of how activists appeal to love as a remedy for injustice. One appeal is the union account of love which involves extending the boundaries of self and who we love by creating a new *we* or *us*.

Methodological findings

The overall methodological approach used in this research is set out in detail in chapter two. The research employed *Activist participatory research* which allows understandings and the unexpected to emerge. The research used *activism from below*, by which I mean understanding by doing the activism, by being on *the streets* and in the *organising spaces*, where the activism is situated and not from above or from the side. This gives insights into *moments* of action and *intensity* that may not be apparent externally, by which I mean observing but not part of the action, or above, by which I mean researching from a distance or from a position in a hierarchy. This activism from below surfaced the importance of *patterns of serendipity* in impactful activism. Social movement theory identifies the importance of resource mobilisation or political opportunities for successful movements to emerge. *Patterns of serendipity* develops this theory by understanding the significance of the interweaving of multiple lucky accidents that make activism impactful in a particular place at a particular time. For example, in the Easter rebellion 2019 the patterns of serendipity included amongst other things:

- Legacy leadership from Rising Up!
- A focus on London with its history of protest
- Protest at places with important memories
- The numbers of people who were arrested
- The way in which those people were arrested
- The way the police reacted
- Sustained warm and dry weather
- The history of a place
- David Attenborough's concurrent hard hitting environmental television programme
- The in-person support of famous individuals with particular skills
- The coming together of the young and the old
- Protest at Easter time with its significance for people of faith.

There are many more lucky accidents noted in this thesis as well as elsewhere whose pattern at this place and at this time intensified the activism and collectively made it more impactful.

Activist Smartphone doings is a methodology and process for the use on the move, overcoming and making sense of the messiness of activism which helps produce different understandings facilitated by smartphones with all of their applications. In practical terms it enabled research whilst fully engaged in planning and committing to actions while generating and recording data on an electronic field diary. However, the methodology accesses the emotions and feelings invoked when being involved in action in real time with feedback from activists. It builds solidarity in real time. It entangles thinking and feeling in activist participant observation. It exposes the interweaving of personal, work and activist lives. It foregrounds and interweaves temporalities, allowing thinking about the day to day in the present, planning for the future with social media from the past. Storing activism of different temporalities for engagement later, together with live feed, calendars and time. These doings change the spatiality of activism, communicate feelings and emotions between activists and communicate intensity. It changes the nature of the spatial and what is understood as place. It juxtaposes the *out there* with the *in here* and connects them. It changes the connectivity of activism in other ways too. Images and texts and voice bring the visual and the aural together. It puts in the same place access to new social media and legacy media allowing *moments* to be captured, reviewed and later understood. In summary smartphones with all of their functionality allows the operationalisation of *Activist Smartphone doings* as a participatory research multi centred/multi place methodology whose use allows greater understanding at that time and subsequently. This method is particularly suited to activist research and its contemporaneous understanding. The methodology gave insight and depth to understandings of how activists become mobilised about environmental issues, how alliances are built and how concerns are expressed effectively. It assisted in the development of conceptual understandings of place, generations and emotion. It particularly assisted in having a more nuanced understanding of answers to research objectives two, three and four.

Contemporary UK environmental activism is now so interweaved by social media and the use of smartphones that understanding these environmentalisms and their shaping of environmental movements, actions and interactions, without being informed by the data generated in these places, is likely to be partial or misleading. We construct our sense of purpose, identity and belonging by how we relate to each other and the places we live our everyday and activist lives, which now includes our smartphones and social media. This intensifies place-based actions, allows activists to respond to what is happening elsewhere in real time, gives activists contact and connectivity to other places, makes activists more visible and incorporates social media and smartphones into the understanding of the place that activism occupies at any one time.

Conceptual contributions

This section summarises how this research helps us better understand the concepts that it has used.

Place: The actions of XR activists were purposely designed to use place to draw attention to the highly complex and diffuse impact of humans on the climate and societies. The meaning they gave to places in taking action in this way often made visible the unequal and slow, but incessant, breakdown of ecosystems with its dramatic tipping points. It identifies how XR's use of different spatial strategies, at different sites of intervention, continuously and intensively, over many days, often simultaneously, magnified their impact. XR activists used the spatialities of the local, the regional, the national and the global and intertwined them. The concept of place is examined in detail in chapter four. This research identifies that place is frequently operationalised when examining the place/activism entanglement in academia but with either narrow aspects of the concept of place, does not differentiate adequately between place and space or engages multiple specialties rather than focusing on examining and researching meanings and practises in a place. In addition, the use of the concept of place is often to examine why movements emerge rather than why they emerge where they do and what place does. This research demonstrates that the concepts of space and place which are sometimes used interchangeably were not interchangeable in this activism and would have led to different understandings. The concepts of space and place therefore need to be carefully used and understood in their application. This research demonstrates that activism is never

only local, regional, national or global. It is completely interconnected, and these scales are interdependent. The activist self is always a spatialized self and by using place productively activists with a wide range of concerns can come together in one place to take action. Purposefully entangling place with activism moves people to action across difference. Place demonstrates the importance of mobile spatial strategies with place and activism creating and shaping each other. Protest creates meaning from a place and creating this meaning sustains activists during long periods. Understanding how and why activists use place is significant and important in understanding their activism.

Generations: The concept of generations was examined in chapter five. This research supports an approach that understands the importance of the development of collective identity in activism. However, this collective identity can be intergenerational and is therefore more complex than sometimes suggested and this collective intergenerational identity is always being built, is dynamic, evolves over time and is powerful. This contemporary environmental activism is a multi-generational and intergenerational endeavour. For example, the young and old taking action together promoted and assisted XR's messaging of urgency, time, extinction and responsibility by engaging different voices to give these messages added authenticity, which strengthened both of their claims. In addition, an understanding and appreciation of generations helps explain and inform what activities and actions activists are prepared and able to take. Using the lens of generations and generational connectedness has benefits in research into other geographies of social change and researchers should consider the appropriateness of using these concepts in their research.

This study identified the significance of eldership. *Eldership* had at least two dimensions. Firstly, the capacity previous activists and activism have created as a potential for activism today and secondly how elders can bring wisdom and enlightenment from their previous experiences from the past into the present to provide signposts and leadership in contemporary activism. This eldership brings into view the importance of stewardship and how things are cared for and inherited. What is passed on and how it is passed on for future generations. That which is inherited from past generations gives future generations potential to build upon.

Stewardship is caring for and passing on institutions, culture, practices, traditions, laws and landmarks but probably most importantly potentials. These concepts are important for at least two reasons in considering XR's activism/generation entanglement. Firstly, what planet and nature is passed onto future generations and what is its potentiality for those future generations. Secondly, as highlighted in chapter three, environmental activism has a history of building on elders' activism with this eldership used, changed and developed. So, eldership was an individual and collective activist practice, built on environmental activists' histories and repertoire, rooted in particular places, creating solidarity across difference in order to change lived experiences.

Emotions: How emotions, feelings and affect are used and entwined with XR's activism is examined in chapter six. There are at least three significant implications for their conceptual use that flow from this research. The first is that emotions in activism can be powerful, but they are contextual and suggesting that some emotions are intrinsically better at motivating certain actions rather than others is not borne out in this research. The relationship within and between emotions, feelings and affect are overlapping and messy. Secondly, anger is often misunderstood conceptually and seen as negative, often generated when people are *out of control*. Activists who focus anger on specific objects and control this focus can demonstrate a powerful collective demand for climate justice rather than it being an expression of deep-seated prejudices. Anger that is undertaken by those who reject violence and are wedded to direct action that is always and exclusively non-violent is different from that which is uncontrolled or violent or both.

Lastly mourning allowed activists to meet in a community and plan for action. Appeals to hope were widespread in XR's activism. I found no evidence that XR activism focus on hope or active hope, which was not about optimism, had any impact in lowering motivation to be involved in activism or urgency to engage in actions to mitigate the impact of climate change and the climate emergency.

Framing: XR activists use of framing in language and discourse and how it shapes, informs and builds upon the long-standing theory of framing is examined in chapter seven. It identifies that framing theory is still remarkably informative in understanding this contemporary environmental activism. It also draws our attention to the tension

between framing that seeks simplicity and clear messaging and that which seeks to promote and explain complexity. It demonstrates that there is a power and effectiveness in simple messaging and framing which encourages focus and action. However, avoiding complex framing due to concerns that it may confuse and disempower, can limit the understanding of the complexity and interconnectedness of issues and ideas where solutions may also be complicated and messy.

Opportunities for further research

XR was only just beginning to emerge into public space as my research commenced. Four years later it has developed rapidly, adapted and changed. This research therefore provides a platform for further qualitative activist research and its contribution towards social change. I have identified seven linked areas of research which either were outside the scope of the research or have been identified as potential future research avenues that build on these research findings.

XR has increased the pace of change, development and creativity of activist strategies, tactics, repertoire and practices. This research has not established the extent that these were adaptations because the state and police have responded more quickly or intensively to the existing activist praxis or if it is because we are in a moment of climate emergency demanding more creative and urgent adaptations. Is it the message that XR activists promote about urgency which is triggering a more intense form of activism or other changed circumstances?

Although the use of social media by activists has been well studied, this research has identified the platforms and applications used by XR and their activists are now so numerous and diverse and the use so central to the activism that the place of social media entanglement with activism needs to be revisited.

This research has identified that some generations are less visible than others in contemporary environmental radical activism. For example, the young and the old were more visible than the middle aged. Researching which generations are foregrounded and which are less noticeable and why needs a greater understanding and further research. In addition, I identified that examining generations and

emotions entanglement with activism from a lifecourse perspective may benefit from further and in-depth research in the future.

In chapter two I reflected upon disruption to research generally and specifically COVID 19 disruptions. The published literature on research disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic almost exclusively focuses on those practical issues of maintaining or adapting the research and the majority on how to successfully move to appropriate online platforms for data collection. Many mention that there may be potential opportunities as a result of disruption. However, there is little examination of what these opportunities may be in practice. I make thirteen observations in chapter two which identify that there may be significant further research opportunities to consider and understand in more detail the wider implication of the pandemic disruption on social research and what it has exposed.

There is little examination in the literature about the role of anger that is controlled and that which is out of control or uncontrollable. This control of, and losing control of anger, needs to be further examined and researched in social movements, particularly those that reject violence and are wedded to direct action that is always and exclusively nonviolent. Insistence that actions must be free from drugs and alcohol allows the potential use of anger, in control, which needs to be understood in the analysis of how it is used. Activists who focus anger on specific objects and can control this focus can demonstrate powerful collective demands, the importance of which should be researched.

This research has taken a particular approach to examining radical environmental activism focusing on those aspects which appear to be particularly important when undertaking activism and what this activism does. Other work could be undertaken focusing more on processes. For example, by mapping when events took place and how they happened with an analysis of how each decision was made and how those decisions were shaped. Who and how people did or did not participate in those decisions and actions. Such research could focus more on questions around different micro decisions that shaped outcomes which would be a substantially different project from the way in which this research was undertaken. It could also foreground the process of those included and excluded in decision-making, requiring

substantially different mapping, focusing on how activism was done rather than what it did and what the results of this were.

Implications for others

In this section I very briefly identify the implications of this research for XR, government and academia.

Extinction Rebellion

XR activists were most powerful when they were most creative. XR activists' purposefulness and intensity has made it different, impactful and powerful and should be examined, maintained and developed. Focus on how emotions are generated around the climate emergency has had benefits. Recently some activists have become concerned about negative messaging and not painting a picture of positive futures. However, activists should not underestimate the positive impact of an *all emotions are welcome* approach has had on its activism. XR storytelling has bound activists together and helped to change the narrative about environmental problems. Activists should not stop sounding the alarm, because governments are notoriously deaf and have the ability for memory loss and amnesia when difficult changes need to be made. XR activists have proved very capable of raising the alarm, other organisations may be better at signposting positive possible futures and solutions. XR activism's collective intergenerational identity is ongoing, built in stages and is evolving and is powerful. Amongst radical environmental activists XR is a leader in facilitating the young and the old, to take action under the same banner and often together. This actively promotes XR's messages and concepts of urgency, temporality and extinction. This proximate discourse between older activists talking about the past, and younger activists about the future, strengthens their collective claims about knowledge, experience and responsibility. Creating opportunities for others with similar beliefs or identities to take action together, from XR Scientists to XR Doctors and XR Grandparents and Elders to XR Families as well as local XR groups, has proved particularly successful.

Government

The government has sought to curtail or stop XR activists' disruption and protests. Exhortations from government ministers and statements of intent by senior officers of

the police to clampdown on XR activists are highlighted throughout this thesis. The current Home Secretary continues to condemn XR's activities, seeks to influence police operational conduct and has changed the law to make more of activists' tactics and repertoire illegal and punishable by greater fines or longer prison sentences. There has been less support for the importance of protest in our democracy and facilitating peaceful protest. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 came into operation in April 2022. Most of the public order provisions in the Act in Part 3 sections 73 to 82, which affect the right to protest, came into force on 28 June 2022. The Act creates new offences to regulate protests, lowers the threshold for the definition of public order offences that are disruptive, which includes disruptive noise, allows the imposition by the police of conditions on protest in a broader range of circumstances and makes the punishment for these offences more serious.

The main tactic of the police in controlling XR actions has been to seek to restrict where activists can protest by physically containing them or using the law of place to make it illegal for them to gather in particular places. On occasions police have attempted to make any protest by XR activists anywhere illegal. During rebellions thousands of activists have been arrested as part of police tactics and thousands of those activists have subsequently been deemed to have been illegally detained by the courts with no further action undertaken. In addition, the Supreme court's ruling on *Director of Public Prosecutions v Ziegler and others* found that activists often have a right to cause a certain degree of disruption before a Public Order Act offence is committed because protest is an element of fundamental Human Rights.

XR activists use the courts as part of their activism and protest not least because it is an opportunity to make a claim that, as they come before a court for allegedly breaking the law, higher laws are being broken and leading to a climate emergency. Activists who are tried in Crown Courts before a judge and jury are sometimes acquitted, either because of a human right to protest, or because despite advice from the judge, a jury is not prepared to convict. This all highlights the complicated relations between activists, the police, the state and the law but these relations have not suppressed or curtailed these activists. Some of the police and state tactics have emboldened activists and made their activism more powerful.

The evidence suggests that making particular non violent activist practises illegal, seeking to imprison more activists and extending the length of their sentence is unlikely to be a deterrent for two reasons. Firstly, obvious and visible oppression of vulnerable activists makes their activism more powerful. Some activists will continue to be arrested and courts are even less likely to convict when the potential sentence is seen by a jury as unreasonably oppressive. Secondly, this research shows the ingenuity and creativity of activists and their ability to adapt their strategy, tactics and repertoire to be disruptive at the margins or boundaries of illegality. Activists will just change and adapt like the Borg!⁵¹

Academia

This research has identified a number of implications for academia. The first is that although some activist researchers have a concern and tension between their academic and activist roles many do not. The second is that this research has identified significant and important areas for future research. Thirdly, major research disruption can be mitigated and it can create new opportunities. Lastly, activism should be subject to more genuinely interdisciplinary research which will make the knowledge produced richer and more useful in its application.

Concluding thoughts

The character of UK environmental activism is one that has a visible and active radical component. This environmental activism searches for and develops strategies and tactics which aim to achieve substantial change in activities that cause the climate emergency and biodiversity loss. XR has based its strategy and tactics on a researched and explicit theory about how change happens. Most recent social movements have largely shunned such overall prescriptive models of how to achieve positive social change and it is unusual for them to have a change paradigm that is based upon a detailed review of the academic literature. Although, as described and examined in chapter three, this theory has been criticised as based on

⁵¹ The Borg are an alien group that appear in the Star Trek franchise who assimilate people and ideas they think may be useful to them. They learn from being attacked by adapting quickly to make subsequent similar attacks ineffective.

a flawed or misunderstood social science academic literature, it continues to be developed in the light of experience and still substantially underpins XR's strategy and tactics and the character of the activism. This civil resistance model therefore has characterised XR's activism. Its activism has sought to recruit significant numbers of activists to take action, challenge the government in urban areas, including the capital city, by taking direct action that is non-violent for sustained and intense periods of time with these actions being creative, fun and appealing to the participants emotions. This has understood how choosing particular places to express the activism determines its impact. XR purposefully identified specific emotions and vulnerabilities to amplify its messages and actively sought to frame its concerns in a way to get them central and noticed. By changing the language used to describe its environmental concerns it sought to inject the character of urgency and scale into environmental discourses. It also sought to avoid blaming and shaming individuals for their personal environmental impacts, seeking rather to focus attention and actions on governments, fossil fuel companies and the system that leads to climate breakdown.

XR is a diffuse, still emerging, dynamic movement that has had considerable impact on narratives about environmentalism in the UK and whose brand spread worldwide within the space of two years. XR has used the potentials of previous environmental activism, but has brought an intentionality, reflexivity, purposefulness and intensity to radical activism. It has directly challenged governments, those who produce fossil fuels and those who fund the extraction or support their current or extended use. It has introduced a wider group of people to activism and exposed vulnerabilities in the state and police when they have sought to curtail or stop its disruption and protests. However, Extinction Rebellion's greatest contribution to contemporary radical environmental activism is that it has shown what is possible. It has created a palpable sense of possibility and hope not only for activists but also for those worried about the climate emergency in the UK. Its impact has become global, giving climate activists repertoires, tactics and agency in places in most countries throughout the world.

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