Interlude: Ethnography as Method

(from *Developing a Compassionate Sense of Place:*
Environmental and social Conscientization in Environmental Organizations,
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In the preceding paper, I argued that sociologically informed environmental social movement organizations would include building an ecological habitus as part of their mission. I explained an ecological habitus as that which would enable living well in place, while using the term "a compassionate sense of place" to describe a logic of practice for environmentally active persons. The questions now become: how are these found in practice, in the field? An empirical study conducted in one locality will be reported in the following two papers, with this "Interlude" providing a detailed description of the methods used in those two papers. Doing so will enable more detail to be presented here, as well as reducing repetition in each following paper.

The research questions were as follows:

1) What evidence is there of a place-conscious ethos of caring – a compassionate sense of place – among environmentalists?
2) Can a compassionate sense of place serve as an environmentally effective logic of practice?

These questions implied that the study should be approached ethnographically. Ethnographic techniques, including participant observation, discussions with key informants, collection of textual data and informal conversations, are particularly well-suited to understanding the specific social practices occurring in a particular site. At the close of the fieldwork period I used formal interviews to probe members' own conceptualizations. Finally, public expressions related to environmental activity or organizations – such as newspaper stories, and organizational communication – were also collected and provided information about the overall field of environmental interest in Thunder Bay, and its relations to other fields. These materials are not reported in this dissertation because of the focus of the research questions on habitus and a compassionate sense of place.

Ethnography in General

Ethnography is a means of gaining a deep, rich understanding of a specific social scene, usually focusing on the "culture" of the social group(s) involved. Immediately, some ethnographers will want to contest that simple definition. There is "a distinct lack of orthodoxy in ethnography" observes Creswell (1998, p. 59). As I will explain later, this study takes the form of an analytic ethnography (Lofland, 1996; Snow, Morrill, & Anderson, 2000), although it draws heavily on critical ethnography (Thomas, 1993). Furthermore, while grounded in the experience of environmentally active people in Thunder Bay, Ontario, it will not involve much description of the scene – what some researchers call "thick" ethnography (Geertz, 1973).Critical forms of inquiry are methodologies for using knowledge, not just a method for finding knowledge (Sorotnik, 1991). They have a normative component, pursuing questions of values, interests and the greatest good in all their ambiguities, even to the point of interrogating power and uncovering existing material and symbolic "relations of ruling" (D. Smith, 1999). Critical ethnography intends an examination of the broader social relations that shape local practice for subordinate groups (Thomas, 1993). Smith (2001) notes that most social scientists deal with description of existing social constructions, rarely even to the point of questioning *qui bono?* Yet, Smith claims, deteriorating environmental conditions demand that social scientists move beyond empirical case studies even of ethics-in-action to do the challenging work of presenting new models of practical action that give attention to ecological relations as well as social ones.

This study, then, is not a conventional ethnography of environmentalists-in-action although it is intended to be grounded in the practical action of people involved in environmental organizations in a community. That I have described a compassionate sense of place and this project as a form of imagining new interpretations of socio-ecological reality aligns it with what Schubert (1991) calls speculative inquiry. "Existing forms of knowledge simply do not speak to the needs of a great many issues. Needed is speculative or imaginative projection as a method [of inquiry]" (p. 67) that fruitfully occupies public space. A compassionate sense of place focuses consideration of forces that act on the material and the experiential; like Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, it tries to undermine dichotomies of structures and agency, subjective and objective, personal and social, human and nature. Nevertheless, it is not a "thick" description as advocated by anthropologists like Clifford Geertz and presented as "conventional" ethnography (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Davies, 1999). Neither, however, is it a pastiche presented as a souped-up, reflexive version of "researcher tales" (Davies, 1999; Van Maanen, 1988). While I am aware that the notion of "a compassionate sense of place" is a conceptual creation – maybe even a bricolage – from within this researcher, reflexivity and the "crisis of representation" in academia in recent years has not necessarily helped critical thought overcome oppressive forms of social reality. So while I take heed of the discussion over reflexivity and representation, I also take Paul Willis' advice:

> Write down what happens, take notes about what people do and say, how they use objects, artefacts, and symbolic forms *in situ*. Do not worry too much about the endless debates concerning ethnographic authority and the slippages of discursive meaning understood from an abstract post structuralism. Tell me something about the world. (Dolby & Dimitriadis, 2004, p. 169)

I seek to "tell something" here, while simultaneously forwarding the possibility of another world (Carroll, 2004; Smyth & Hattam, 2000). So while the research is grounded in the "insurgent" work of social movements (Haluza-DeLay, 2004; Lofland, 1996), it is nevertheless, grounded.

Ethnographers of all sorts emphasize that the research process is one of balancing rigour and openness.

> There is merit in both "loose," inductively-oriented designs, and "tight," more deductively approached ones. The former work well when the terrain is unfamiliar, and/or excessively complex...and the intent is exploratory and descriptive. (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 431)

This study took the latter route – a tighter approach culminating in formal interviews. This approach, rather than the inductive format conventionally used by ethnographers, was chosen for a number of reasons. First and most importantly, I was guided by the specific facets incorporated into the notion of a compassionate sense of place as ecological habitus. This moved the methodology several steps ahead in ethnographic procedures (such as Spradley's [1980] "Developmental Research Sequence") minimizing but not eliminating the initial stages of rudimentary description that then leads to more focused observation.

Second, I had been generally involved in the environmental community for more than two years in this location and was somewhat known. Familiarity with me was further enhanced because I had produced a well-publicized report on racism in Thunder Bay, called *A Community* *of Acceptance: Respect for Thunder Bay's Diversity* (Haluza-DeLay, 2002). In many cases, this facilitated my position as both a credible compatriot and a respectable researcher. Third, having experience conducting other ethnographic studies,[1] other scholars advise, leads one to see the world as an ethnographer (Davies, 1999), and enables one to move more quickly into ongoing analysis (Glancy, 1986; Handwerker, 2001).

In this study, I took a position as something of an insider, on the continuum towards active participation rather than merely observation. In part, I sought to help build the movement in both practical and theoretically-engaged ways (Charmaz, 2005). I helped the only environmental group in the region with that all-important charitable status recover that status from suspension by doing its government-required reporting for the past three years. As well, the Ontario Environmental Network (OEN) was attempting to build its representation through a regional network and I helped recruit participants for meetings, especially trying to link the OEN to anti-racism, Aboriginal, and church groups with an environmental interest. I had also been previously active with the local Green Party, and represented it with prepared statements at several provincial hearings, such as an education task force. Over-identification with environmental organizations was not a threat (Grills, 1998). The study was focused on everyday practices and the operating logic behind these. For an activist to do research on what might be a more publicly effective way of doing things, means attending carefully to one's observations and assumptions in the effort to find what would be even more effective.

In the process of the research, it became clear that many members of other community organizations were environmentally interested, but were not part of "environmental" groups. Some of these people were included in interviews. Furthermore, many people indicated that what I was looking for was fascinating and something they rarely thought about. Many relished the opportunity to think through some of their views, and their practices.

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[1] These include a wilderness trip (DeLay, 1996; Haluza-DeLay, 1999, 2001a); analysis of the advocacy and response to the *A Community of Acceptance* research (Haluza-DeLay, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c), and an authoethnography of doing environmental education in church-based settings (Haluza-DeLay, 2001b, 2005a, under review).

> Mary[2]: Such hard questions!
> Randy: I make no apology for that!...
> Mary: These things are always helpful to us too, because it makes us step back, and the next thing we have to write – it gives us a little different perspective.
> Randy: I remember what you said – 'We never take the time to study ourselves.'
> Mary: ... You start talking about it and you realize you are doing things in a certain way for a certain reason. (Interview, Mary and Brian)

Among the potential benefits of ethnography is uncovering aspects of the social scene that help to explain it but which are not normally available to the explicit knowledge of members. Spradley (1980) asserted that a large portion of our cultural knowledge is tacit and outside of cognitive apprehension. This corresponds to the workings of the habitus (Lane, 2000). Reed-Danahay (2005) and Wacquant (2004) reminded scholars that Bourdieu began as an ethnographer, during the Algerian revolutionary period of the 1950s. The concept of habitus was introduced to solve an empirical puzzle, that of the disjuncture between traditional Kabyle society and the new conditions being generated by Algerian modernization (Wacquant, 2004; see also Lane, 2000, and Reed-Danahay, 2005). This means that Bourdieu was not foremost a theorist, but a researcher who developed theoretical tools to facilitate sociological explanation (Camic & Gross, 1998).[3]

Other ethnographers go further than merely seeking to illuminate tacit knowledge present in the field site. In various ways "critical ethnography" (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Thomas, 1993), "institutional ethnography" (Smith, 1999; Campbell & Gregor, 2002), and "reflexive ethnography" (Davies, 1999) assert that the social scene is not sufficient of itself, that what goes on is at least partly structured by what Dorothy Smith (1999) calls "extra-local relations of ruling." The researcher who values member perspective must also attend to ways that their perspective may be socially shaped. Snow, Morrill and Anderson (2000) "bemoan" the "tendency" for ethnographers to neglect the theoretical side of research. They attribute a good deal of this neglect to the predominance of "grounded theory" in ethnography, that is, to describe the social world completely from within that world (Creswell, 1998), but which leads to neglect of substantive and sustained theorizing relevant across cases.

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[2] Pseudonyms have been used throughout, and in some cases, personal details and organizational affiliations have been obscured in order to protect anonymity.

[3] Bourdieu has been drawn on heavily by both sociologists and anthropologists. Reed-Danahay is the latter, which made reading her book refreshingly informative for someone who was considerably more familiar with the sociological use of Bourdieu (Haluza-DeLay, 2005b).

Ironically, although I attend to "place" and "caring," both of which demand deliberate attention to particularities, I concur with such critiques. Analytic ethnography is a theory-driven approach to studying a social scene. Lofland (1996) characterizes it as "attempt[ing] to provide generic propositional answers to questions about social life and organization" culminating in an analysis that is "conceptually elaborated, descriptively detailed, and concept-data interpenetrated" (p. 367). I sought to do that by interpellating the interview participants with the idea of a compassionate sense of place. Snow et al. (2000) argue for three types of theory orientation for analytic ethnography. The first type is *theory discovery*, but at middle range levels rather than grounded theory. Snow, et al. describe this as "substantive theory," developed for "particular *empirical* domains, such as juvenile delinquency, medical education, hospital organizations, or dying" (emphasis in original, p. 185), but not at the site-specific levels of *this* juvenile detention centre, or *that* street scene. The second type is *theory extension*, which "extends pre-existing theoretical or conceptual formulations to other groups or aggregations, to other bounded contexts or places, or to other socio-cultural domains" (p. 187). By way of example, Goffman's theory of "frames" was extended by Snow himself into social movements (Snow & Benford, 2000), which then became a recognized tool of analysis for numerous other researchers. The third type is *theory refinement*, whereby the data and existing theory inform each other, in order to improve theory. These three "types" are not mutually exclusive, nor the only way for theory to be part of ethnographic work.

My study was clearly theory-driven, while following the exhortation to allow theory and data to mutually inform each other. The techniques of analytic ethnography may not be much different than in more conventional ethnography, according to Lofland (1996), but the orientation is. In this study, analytic attention was directed to observations that reflect a compassionate sense of place, such as caring, attentiveness, place-meanings, specific environmentally sensitive practices and so on. The theory of habitus was extended into that of an ecological habitus, while the study also intends to refine the concept of a compassionate sense of place by attention to the "caring in place" of environmentally active people in this region of Northwest Ontario.

Specific Methods

The Thunder Bay Field Site

The Thunder Bay region presents an interesting field site for a project in environmental awareness. The region has a long resource extraction history, but also a large urban centre with a population over 100,000. Tourism is significant and primarily nature-based, and the local university has a large outdoor recreation degree program, as well as other faculties that claim "Environment" in their titles (including the Faculty of Forestry and the Forest Environment, which is widely claimed as the most traditionalist of loggers of any forestry university department in the country). Nestled on a protected bay of sparkling Lake Superior, it is hundreds of kilometres from other urban centres, surrounded "on three sides by trees [and rock], one side by water" as one interviewee described it. Part of Ontario, it is nevertheless far removed from "the halls of power" in southern Ontario. This gives it a sense of its own marginality, a feature exacerbated by over two decades of economic and population decline. In fact, in a book-length ethnography of Thunder Bay working-class culture conducted in 1984-1986, Dunk (1991) demonstrated how this north-south marginality reproduces itself and affects social relations. He argued that Thunder Bay racism, particularly against Aboriginal peoples is a function of the perception that they are favoured wards of distant governments. Thus, the antipathy toward "those of the south" was transferred to local Aboriginal peoples.

Thunder Bay's history spans centuries of inhabitation, as a hub of east-west travel at the "head of the lake," where rivers and railroads come from the west to Lake Superior. It was one of the important sites of the fur trade with European settlement, which means that Aboriginal-White relations have been socially, economically, and politically entwined for three centuries. There is a considerable history of political disenfranchisement, paternalism, and racism (Dunk, 1991; Haluza-DeLay, 2002, 2003c), as well as cultural revitalization and political resurgence. Aboriginal peoples are conspicuously absent from environmental groups, although not from government and industrial discussions on land and resource management. Aboriginal people have been marginalized but are a growing demographic, economic and political force. There has been some limited partnership work between environmental groups and Aboriginal groups in the region, primarily on land and resource issues. Further west, the Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishnabek (Grassy Narrows First Nation) have been actively supported by church, peace and environmental groups through one fight after another over 20 years. Finns, Italians and other ethnic groups have become other significant portions of the otherwise highly British-descended population. The city depends on primary resource extraction for its economic livelihood; the "three sides trees" has considerable impact on its culture (Dunk, 1994, 2002).

The antipathy toward southern Ontario is demonstrated in environmental affairs. Letters to the editor of local newspapers sometimes expressed an attitude that distant environmentalists were trying to tell them what to do. This became particularly pronounced during the debates over the cancellation of the spring bear hunt in 1999 (Dunk, 2002). Furthermore, corporations such as Bowater – an international timber operation – played up the "environmentalists from the south" angle; a discursive strategy that gave them putative "local" status despite the actual direction of the flows of authority, decisions and revenues. However, the "southern" link is not so simple; a number of the environmentally active people I interviewed were lifelong Thunder Bay natives and most of the rest had been there a decade or more. Environment North is one of the most prominent local environmental organizations. On its website, it describes itself,

> ENVIRONMENT **north** has a "pro-north" perspective, and attempts to represent interests and particular issues of the region.... We think objectives of diversifying the economy while maintaining the natural resource base need to be central in regional practices. In other words, a "sustainable" North, where economic and social decisions contribute to the long-term. (http://www.environmentnorth.ca/about_us.htm. Accessed October 15, 2006, Punctuation as in original)

These are discursive representations, wherein locality and place are mobilized as symbolic capital in the struggles over position in the community.

I spent the years 1999-2002 in Thunder Bay. Deliberate fieldwork occurred between May and December 2002, but even before that time I attended public gatherings and events of the few environmental groups, as well as more private meetings and personal encounters. I also participated in meetings with other community groups, particularly related to following up the racism study. While there are about 20 non-profit, non-governmental groups that could be loosely labelled "environmental" organizations, most are small with few meaningful meetings or events.

They do not exist "in name only" but are mustered when some issue presents itself. People also come together in ad hoc association over particular matters. These included organizing a wind co-operative to promote renewable energy, running the annual "Sustainability Fair" in a church hall, and ensuring that environmental topics were represented in the films shown at local festivals. People mattered more than organizations, although affiliation could make a difference, as the president of one organization mentioned,

> [Organizational Name] gives an umbrella where I can do things. Hard to do as an individual. But I can do it more as organization. When I go to talk to councillors, I always remind them that [this organization] has 750 members. (Interview, Stan)

Nonetheless, it was the initiatives of individuals that developed individual reputation and drove environmental topics forward. As this became more clear in the ethnographic component of the study, it solidified my decision to conduct formal interviews.

Forest issues, and water and land management were the most prevalent issues labelled as "environmental" issues. The working group on wind energy also formed during this time and is loosely associated with one of the more prominent community organizations. Some mobilization began around a proposal for a new power station utilizing "pet-coke" (a byproduct of far-off Alberta tar sands oil production, and disallowed as a fuel by Alberta law). There were some groups dealing with "lifestyle" issues of energy conservation, recycling and consumerism. These tended to be very local in character. On land management issues, especially forestry, several provincial or national organizations were involved, but with very little local involvement other than specific well-recognized individuals.

Most people overlapped their organizational involvements, considering themselves as environmentally interested, rather than group or organization specific. This was fine by me, as I was interested in the dynamics of being environmentally active rather than the specifics of organizational membership. Researchers attempting to delineate the extent of environmentalism in an area are faced with classificatory concerns (Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Kempton, et al., 2001; Markowitz, 2001). For example, is a hunting and fishing group that does some game management an environmental group? Said one speaker at a moose hunting seminar, "We share with other parts of the ecosystem [wolves killing moose] and I think all hunters appreciate that" (Fieldnotes, September 18). There are other contentious classifications – health groups now sometimes called environmental health or eco-justice groups, so-called "wise-use" groups, which are often construed as anti-environmental because their version of how to live in relation to the environment is contrary to preservation principles (Kempton, et al., 2001).

Conceivably, since "the environment" includes such definitions as "the totality of surrounding conditions" (Onelook Dictionary search, http://www.onelook.com/) a tremendous variety and unmanageable number of organizations could be construed as part of the environmental "field" in Thunder Bay. Furthermore, it also became clear that there was considerable interplay between the environmental community organizations or non-profit sector, and governmental ministries, and for-profit sectors. For example, one interviewee worked as a municipal employee with responsibilities in environmental services, and was involved with several organizations considered environmental. His involvement was sometimes as a City representative and sometimes as a private citizen. In conversation, his diverse "hats" were not usually separated; I often had to ask to whom he was referring when he used "we" during the interview. Sometimes it meant the city, sometimes his family, sometimes one or another environmental organization, or the whole citizenry becoming more environmentally aware.

I took a "common sense" approach to what was an environmental group, following how individuals and groups tended to self-identify. For example, I attended some meetings of hunting-related groups, as they often talk about conservation. Ultimately, however, I made the decision that an environmental group was one that sought to protect the environment, and was "recognized" as an environmental group by other groups in the region (Andrews & Edwards, 2004).

Data Collection

Much of the ethnographic data collection has been sketched above. I went to every publicly advertised environmental event or meeting that I could attend during the period from May to December 2002. When I heard from contacts or "through the grapevine" of other meetings, I attended them when feasible. I introduced myself when possible, and explained that I was doing graduate research on environmentalism in Thunder Bay. I also clipped every article or advertisement that dealt with the topic of "the environment" from the local newspapers. Over time, I began to realize that while there was not a lot of publicly apparent activity, there were indeed many meetings, and that many of the same people usually participated. Since I was also involved in the follow-up to *A Community of Acceptance* I participated in a considerable number of other meetings of groups like Diversity Thunder Bay, the Thunder Bay Health Coalition, Lakehead Social Planning Council, and the Mayor's Committee on Race Relations. This led to a rich understanding of the nonprofit and community organizational world of Thunder Bay, that would not otherwise have been visible from my participation with environmental groups alone.

Field notes were written by hand, during or as soon after events as possible. They were later typed and additional recollections added at later readings. Kouritzin (2002) noted "fieldnotes impose order on the everyday phenomena" observed by the researcher (p. 127). Mine followed the heuristics of caring, place and habitus as elaborated by my application of analytic ethnography. Observations faced constant analysis, through the guidance of "how does this present caring?" and "how does this present practices of an environmental habitus" (Creswell, 1998; Lofland, 1996; Snow et al. 2000; Spradley, 1980). Such constant analysis directed further data collection, and eventually the interviews.

In the last few weeks of my field time, I began conducting formal interviews. Twenty-three interviews with 27 people were conducted in November and December 2002. The guiding principle was that these be "environmentally active people," who were involved with local organizations and seemed likely to yield theoretically informative results. Arcury and Quandt (1999) described a "site-based procedure" for recruiting participants for qualitative studies. While their focus is on obtaining a relatively representative sample, my focus was on representing viewpoints, specifically attempting to obtain views from the range of people involved across a diverse range of environmental organizations. Therefore, modifying Arcury and Quandt's procedure, I generated a list of organizations that had become visible in the participatory phase of the study. Charting of the organizations showed at least two clusters depending on general focus of the organization's projects – a "protected lands" cluster, and a "lifestyle-community" cluster.[4]

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[4] There were several nodal organizations (and one individual) who connected the clusters, and the local groups with provincial organizations. The data collection was not able to articulate the level at which habituses vary according to positions in the environmental field. However, this is a recommendation for fruitful further study: accompanying ethnographic work with social network surveying designed to articulate distinctions among the

Depending on the apparent diversity of viewpoints in the organizations, I identified specific individuals to interview. Three of the interview participants would more fairly be described as "social" activists (anti-poverty, food security, housing), but had been involved in an environmental event. For example, one person who was staff at a poverty-related agency had attended an OEN weekend retreat more than a day's drive away. Since the concept of a compassionate sense of place necessarily includes social sustainability as well as environmental attention, it was completely appropriate to include these people. Similarly, several of the interviewees who were environmentally focused also had social justice involvements.

Nearly everyone I asked to interview agreed to participate. The 27 people are reasonably representative of the members of the organizations involved, or, one could say, the environmental "field" in Thunder Bay. This group included some members of organizations that might seem peripheral to that field, such as Ducks Unlimited – once identified as a hunter self-interest group – or Trees Thunder Bay – primarily a community beautification organization. Appendix B shows my working list of environmental organizations in Thunder Bay, along with the relative involvements of the 27 interview participants. Some people were involved in several organizations, some of which only became apparent during the interview (hence the seeming over-representation of participants and part-time employees of EcoSuperior). Although I selected the interviewees through their organizational involvements, the individuals were not consistently affiliated over the months of fieldwork. Involvement shifted as new issues hit the media, seasons changed (e.g., the rhythms of gardening, or legislative sittings, or kayaking season) or personal circumstances varied. Furthermore, their associations flowed among organizations, occasionally meeting each other on projects, at meetings, or on hiking trails. This cross-participation certainly contributed to "recognition" of each other as environmentally active. A couple of people were not specifically involved in any organization, but took an active role in events; for example, this is the case for one of the primary organizers of the Sustainability Fair.

The interviews took between 45 minutes and two hours. The Interview Brief is included in Appendix A. However, the interviews took the form of conversations, loosely structured by the question plan. Fontana and Frey (1994) described an interview as a "co-constructed encounter."

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affiliated individuals.

Because of the effort to explore deep-seated, often unreflexive, and perhaps unconscious elements of the *sens pratique*, I deliberately structured the interviews in this fashion. Participants felt free to question me, as represented by the following encounter (this section of the interview was not fully transcribed; what follows is a close paraphrase, except where verbatim words are placed in quotations):

> Jack: Are you going to address whether humans are part of the natural world?
> Randy: Oh [joking] I think we are completely separate. I mean, we don't eat or have to sleep or drink or poop or anything.
> Jack: [Laughs, then starts to explain.] Because that's not fair to a lot of people either – like, who should eat meat – we are part of the ecosystem.
> Randy: [I say we don't act as if we are. I mention Minimum Impact Camping.] “Why did you ask the question?”
> Jack: “Just interested in your perspective. Because that will factor in in how you approach it.”
> Randy: [I talk about the caring thing a while.]
> Jack asks if I have any personal opinions.
> Randy: “Oh, yes.”
> Jack: “Well – what are they?” [sounds a little irritated, as if he shared and now I should]
> Randy: [I talk about idea of a compassionate sense of place] – unless people think differently, they are not likely to actually change structures. (Interview, Jack)

I often described my own perceptions and beliefs during the interviews. In addition, in the letter confirming the interview beforehand, I had informed participants of the nature of the project – entitled “Developing a compassionate sense of place” – and pointed them at two items that I had placed on the internet describing initial conceptualisations. One item was a proposal for a Social Science and Humanities Doctoral Fellowship (successful) – thus written in highly academic language. The other item was the power-point presentation I had used to explain my emerging idea of a compassionate sense of place – thus written in an outline format, with evocative quotations and comments yet somewhat cryptic. These items became another avenue for conversation for those who perused them, and “primed the pump” for their thoughts.

It is important to note that these were environmentally active people, not *activists* per se. Few called themselves activists, and I did not necessarily want those who would. Some of the interview participants would only accept “soft” labelling as “environmentalists” and attempted to clarify with me their reasons for being uncomfortable with that label. The youngest interview participants were in their late 20s; participants otherwise ranged across the ages into their 70s. Professions included doctors, foresters, biologists, a retired teacher. Eight were actually staff – often part-time or contract – of environmental organizations. Most were volunteers. Eleven of the 27 were female. Several ran business trying to put their environmental values into practice and employment; none of these businesses were particularly successful. Thunder Bay is small enough that most of the people knew each other, although sometimes only by name. All were white, which is significant because Aboriginal people make up between 7-15% of the population of Thunder Bay, and a considerably higher percent in the rest of Northwestern Ontario.[5] In fact, there seemed to be few linkages with Aboriginal organizations, as Ballamingie (2006) also found in her research on the St. Lawrence region coalitions around land management associated with the Living Legacy campaigns. Because there were few Aboriginal peoples involved in environmental organizations I did not include any representatives in the study. While this may be considered a deficiency in the study, unpacking the concepts and practices in the First Nations cultures of the region would have added a great deal of complexity to the study. More saliently, Ruby Farrell, Director of the Indigenous Studies department at Lakehead University, advised that the concepts of place and caring likely mean very different things in Aboriginal culture, in ways that would take years to understand, if even possible by someone schooled in a different epistemology (Ruby Farrell, personal communication, 2002)[6]. Therefore, this study was limited to those participants directly involved with environmental organizations in Thunder Bay.

Interviews were tape recorded and converted to digital recordings. Transcription software was used to facilitate the transcribing process (Transana, 2004). This software allowed the typed transcript to be linked to the actual digital recording. Thus, not only were the words available for analysis, but so were the inflections, tone, and other vocal modalities that convey meaning. Full transcriptions were produced of the first dozen interviews; partial transcripts were produced after emerging categories become apparent and saturation of categories began (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The linking of transcripts to recording within Transana also meant that word-by-word transcripts were less necessary, as the actual recording could be easily accessed, thus saving transcription time.

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[5] Based on 2001 Canadian Census numbers estimated upwards to address sampling errors such as under-participation, literacy and resistance that tend to underrepresent First Nations populations. In the Thunder Bay *Census Metropolitan Area*, Aboriginal peoples comprised 8200 (6.8%) of the 120,370 population. This rises in the Thunder Bay District to 13,150 (8.7%) of the 149,180. In the Thunder Bay *Health Unit*, Aboriginal peoples comprise 17,820 (11.5%) of the 155,755. See the 2001 Community Profiles (http://www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01/CP01/Index.cfm?Lang=E). Nevertheless, some undercounting is still expected and the census is resisted, despite Statistic Canada's best efforts.

[6] Dr. Farrell and I had many conversations along these lines, and on the Diversity Thunder Bay research (Haluza-DeLay, 2002). Cree epistemology was the subject of her own doctoral dissertation.

Analysis

Transcripts and field notes were imported into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software package (ATLASti, 2004). These documents were coded top-down by a coding manual developed prior to analysis and added to during the hermeneutic cycle that followed. I listened to the original tape of the interview while coding. Kahn (2001) describes the conventions of using a coding manual. This allowed a better appreciation of the communicated meanings as vocal inflections could also be heard. A method of constant comparison involving saturation of categories was followed (Creswell, 1998; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). However, as noted, the analysis was directed by the heuristics of place, caring and habitus in an attempt to refine and develop theory that is more applicable for the development of better socio-ecological orientations.

Researchers are usually warned to be alert to the ways research can produce findings in concert with the methods used to develop the data. Bourdieu, in particular, warns of the “scholastic fallacy,” that is, understanding social worlds through abstracted “thinking the world”, or, reading “the logic of theory into the logic of practice” as Karakayali (2004, p. 363) summarizes. One drawback with ethnographic observation is that one can only observe behaviour and not the reasons or dispositions that underlie behaviour. But in what is generally accepted as the corrective for this deficiency – that of asking (interviewing) about behaviour or reasons for behaviour – the researcher automatically requires the participant to frame their responses through articulated deliberation and instrumental rationality, epistemological principles that may be at odds with how people actually operate in their social worlds.

Therefore, that there seemed to be reflexive elements in what I have described as an environmental habitus may be an artifact of interviewing. However, participatory involvement among environmental groups, the intentionally conversational nature of the interviews, providing material ahead of time for comment, and discussions of deeply philosophical but generally undefined notions such as “caring” and “respect” were all means of matching method to the presumed “pre-logical” character of the habitus. Such methodological control provides more confidence that reflexive, cognitive, praxis was indeed part of the habitus carried by these environmentally active people (and this will be discussed further in *Habitus and cognitive praxis among environmentalists*).

Writing

Richardson (1994) described writing the research as a “method of inquiry” (p. 923). Similarly, Kouritzin (2002) refers to trying to “write my way into understanding” (p. 127). I came to understand a compassionate sense of place much more as I talked with participants, transcribed, re-read, categorized, teased apart and put back together, and then wrote about these ideas and the ways that environmentally active persons practiced their many-varied ways of being environmentally active. Although it has trappings of conventional ethnographic accounts, this work is not intended to be a realist picture of the world of the environmentally active. It is a pastiche, a creation that seeks to be creating (of a compassionate sense of place) even as it is informed by the created worlds of Thunder Bay environmentalism. My hope is that this research will help do what Thomas (1993) described, “critical ethnography proceeds from an explicit framework that, by modifying consciousness or invoking a call to action, attempts to use knowledge for social change” (p. 4). Whereas qualitative research was once said to be legitimated by evoking “recognition” by members, we can now say it is something quite different (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). If social movements are contestations with hegemonic realities, then research in the service of social movements must be imaginative transformations of those realities (Haluza-DeLay, 2004, 2006). Bourdieu (1998) emphasized the role of social scientists as to create new tools for the shaping of societies, based on their analysis of the current conditions of society.

Both the following papers – *Habitus and cognitive praxis among environmentalists* and *Caring for place? Possibilities for a compassionate sense of place among environmentalists* – are ethnographic accounts that present evidence of a compassionate sense of place in the process of scrutinizing environmentalist habitus. Whereas in *The practice of environmentalism* I argued that an ecological habitus would help one live well in place, for *Habitus and cognitive praxis among environmentalists*, I decided that in an unecological society an ecological habitus is an ideal. *Habitus and cognitive praxis among environmentalists* re-examines the habitus concept, and examines how environmentally active people conduct themselves. Interrogating the actuated habitus of environmentalists, the paper uses the term "environmental habitus." Specifically, it acknowledges the many ways of being environmentally active, and characterizes four distinct forms of dispositions that seem to constitute important parts of an environmental habitus in a community where such a habitus does not fit smoothly. *Caring for place?* extends that general analysis by narrowing the scope to the domain of "caring for [a] place." This requires analysis of the meanings of place, and the ways that caring was conceived or practiced. *Caring for place?* concludes with discussion of a compassionate sense of place.

At this point, reiterating that this dissertation is constructed as a series of integrated articles is important. The two papers that follow are not a comprehensive ethnographic portrait of Thunder Bay environmentalism. They are slices, for specific purposes of theory extension and refinement. In addition, they are intended to be independently published and are therefore stylized for journal publication. The articles do not, therefore, exactly fit conventions of most dissertations. Although in the process of writing for the dissertation I have included some aspects that I would expect to eliminate for subsequent journal publication in order to present a more complete picture, these two following papers are not "chapters" in the conventional sense.

Senses of place and envisioning of social and ecological alternatives require different epistemological and ontological frames than those prioritized within modernist social scientific frames. Commenting on the "crisis of representation" in ethnography (and qualitative research generally) and calling for diversity in narrative forms, Tierney (2002) simply states that we should not be apologetic or defensive any longer in our writing of the research. That is challenging when one's future rests on publishing in the face of criticism or otherwise defending one's work! The even greater challenge, of course, would be how to represent the other residents of a place, those who do not have human voice (Russell, 2005). I have not chosen to do that here, but look forward to new ways of presenting "socionatures" (Brady, 2005; White, 2006).

One example is Basso's (1996) continuing anthropological research with the Cibecue Apache. An aspect clearly conveyed in that work is the sort of knowing generated by the places – "wisdom sits in places" is how the Apache informants described them. It is an intersubjectivity between personal and placedness that disputes much of Western epistemological traditions. The book, an anthropological account funded by the National Science Foundation, won a creative nonfiction book award. From his position as an academic with 40 years experience with the Cibecue people Basso (1996) writes,

> The experience of place... is, in anthropology and the social sciences generally, lightly charted territory. There are few intellectual maps for ethnographers to follow, and therefore they are obliged to fashion them for themselves. But where does one turn for direction and helpful ideas? The answer, of course, is wherever one chooses to turn or... wherever things look bright (p. xvi).

Basso found some brightness in a wide assortment of philosophers, historians, poets, naturalists, physicists, and of course, Aboriginal peoples and writers on Native America.

This is the task in this project: to look for helpful ideas with which to weave this tapestry of a concept; to balance rigour and imagination; to find out what is this thing called a compassionate sense of place; and to explore existing logics of practice of environmentalists with an eye toward new perspectives on socio-ecological relations.

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