CITIZEN YOUTH: CULTURE, ACTIVISM, AND AGENCY IN AN ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to uncover some of the cultural practices central to youth activist subcultures across three urban centres in Canada: Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. I undertake this work within the context of rising moral and state claims about the need for ‘good citizenship’ for young people, alongside a late modern relationship between liberalism, neoliberalism, and Canada’s history of class- and race-based exclusions. The theoretical framework bridges cultural and political sociology (e.g. Bourdieu, Rose) with youth cultural theory (e.g. Bettie). It also draws heavily upon the work of feminist philosophers of agency and the state. The main methodology is ethnographic, and was carried out within a phenomenological and hermeneutic framework. In total, 41 young people, ages 13-29, were involved in this research. Participants self-identified as being involved in activist work confronting globalization, war, poverty and/or colonialism.

The findings of this study suggest that the effects of the historical and contemporary symbol of the ‘good citizen’ are felt within youth activist subcultures through a variety of cultural means, including: expectations from self and schooling to be ‘responsible,’ with its associated burdens of guilt; policing practices that appear to rely on cultural ideas about the ‘good citizen’ and the ‘bad activist’; and representations of youth activism (e.g. within media) as replete with out-of-control young people being punished for their wrong doings. Wider effects include the entrenched impacts of class- and race-based exclusions, which manifest within youth activist subcultures through stylistic regimes of ‘symbolic authorization’ that incorporate attire, beliefs, and practices. Although findings suggest that many young people come to activism via a predisposition created within an activist or Left-leaning family, this research also highlights the
relational means by which people from outside of this familial *habitus* can come to activist practices. Taken together, findings suggest that youth activism must be understood as a cultural and social phenomenon, with requisite preconditions, influences, and effects; that such practices cannot be disassociated from wider social inequalities; and that such effects and influences demand scrutiny if we are to reconsider the role of activism and its part in expanding the political boundaries of the nation-state.
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DEDICATION

For Cuc and the Bean
1 INTRODUCING ‘CITIZEN YOUTH’: CONTEXT, RELEVANT LITERATURE, AND KEY ARGUMENTS

1.1 Introduction: Citizen Youth in the 21st century

This thesis explores the dilemmas and cultural dynamics of being young and politically engaged in 21st century Canada. It takes as its starting point those young people enacting their citizenship through contestation of the state: that is, youth activists. Activism and citizenship are not necessarily easy bedfellows, although the former often presumes access to the latter. In pairing these two concepts alongside this study of young Canadians, I attempt to make sense of how youth citizenship has, in some ways, come to be conflated with a certain notion of activism, while, paradoxically, also representing the limits of activism and its associated borders, beyond which ‘good citizens’ do not tread. I use the concept of ‘citizenship,’ and the associated moral claims that have been historically attached to this term, to consider the manner in which three specific urban groups of young people across Canada establish their relationship with the state, with each other, and with activism itself.

Through an ethnographic study of young people (ages 13 to 29) working on activist causes linked to globalization, poverty, war, and/or colonialism1 across Canada’s three largest urban centres, this thesis explores what it means to be a certain kind of youth ‘citizen’ in 21st century Canada. It asks three broad questions which address the relationship between young people, the state, and citizenship. First, it poses a sociological question about what role the history of state claims about the ‘good and moral citizen’ may play in shaping (constraining or accommodating) both activist cultures and the potential for young people to enact their activism.

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1 I chose these particular inter-locking issues because it was my perception that many of the people involved in these movements work across an array of issues within this general field. Thus, one cannot speak exclusively of “anti-globalization” activists, without noting the important work that many of the same people carry out on issues of war, (neo)colonialism, and poverty.
Second, it considers the question of who is and who is not able to enact such citizenship and seeks to identify those social and cultural forces which serve to legitimize the ‘good activist,’ and what such legitimizations – as forms of inclusion and exclusion -- might mean for political action in a democratic public sphere. Finally, it examines the question of how young people come to activism, or something that they see as political action, by exploring the largely classed modalities of agency available to them.

In the pages that follow, I shall begin by tracing one example of the contradictory signifiers and iconographic symbols associated with the youth citizen-activist today, an example intended to situate the reader in some of the dilemmas associated with what I have referred to as the new ‘Citizen Youth.’ I will then outline the research questions that guide this study, consider the contemporary context and literature within which the study is situated, and conclude by outlining the chapters and summarizing the key arguments I will be making throughout.

1.2 Problematic and research questions: good youth activist/bad youth activist

On April 21st, 2001, the front page of the Globe and Mail\(^2\) was dominated by a graphic colour photograph of a young man, blood streaming down his face, held tightly between two police officers in full riot gear. The photo showed the police dragging him away from the bedlam in the background, of which he appeared to be positioned as a key inciter. The description below reads: “A bloodied protester is arrested yesterday after about 5,000 demonstrators clashed with riot police and crashed through the three-meter high fence surrounding the site of the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec.”

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\(^2\) The Globe and Mail is one of Canada’s two national newspapers. With a weekly circulation of two million, it is Canada’s largest circulation national newspaper (Wikipedia: the Free Encyclopedia, 2007). As noted on Wikipedia (2007), “The Globe and Mail is widely considered to be Canada’s newspaper of record.”
This image was one of a series depicting the mass mobilizations that took place in Quebec City from April 20 to 22, 2001 to protest the Free Trade Area of the Americas. The demonstrations precipitated the “largest police deployment in Canadian history” (Chang et al., 2001), and were the subject of massive mainstream media attention, with coverage in newspapers, television stations, and radio shows across the country. While the written content of the coverage occasionally represented varied political views, the images that were broadcast of the protests unilaterally depicted a chaotic war zone, filled with violent resistance, property destruction, and irresponsible hooliganism. These images were also remarkable for their focus on the actions of young people who took part in the demonstrations, even though vast numbers of participants

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3 The actual numbers of people who participated in the massive demonstrations against the Free Trade Area of the Americas Summit is a source of contention. For example, where one commentator suggests the numbers at 30,000 (Malik, 2001), another suggests that there were 70,000 people participating in the protests (MacKay, 2002). The Free Trade Area of the Americas is an (as yet un-ratified) proposed expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement to incorporate all of the countries of the Western hemisphere, with the exception of Cuba.

4 By mainstream media I mean those media sources used by the majority of people in Canada as their source of news and information, including the two national daily papers in Canada (the Globe and Mail and the National Post) as well as metropolitan dailies such as the Toronto Star, the Montreal Gazette, and the Vancouver Sun.
were drawn from the trade union movement, largely made up of older workers. If, however, the
media images were to be relied upon, the protests in Quebec City were single-handedly carried
out by groups of young people in their early twenties, most of them male, and most of these
engaged in violent actions.

Now fast forward to January, 2006, less than five years after the historic protests in
Quebec City. The political horizon appears to have shifted, as a new era of ‘anti-terrorism’
policies and wars have been ushered in on the heels of the attacks on the World Trade Centre and
the Pentagon in September of 2001. Anti-globalization protests, while still occurring, are not
receiving mainstream Canadian coverage5, and their attendance seems to have been subdued in
the post-9/11 era of suspicion and security certificates.6 While mainstream Canadian media
coverage of youth activists appears to have waned, there are other sites of representation in the
public record. One such I stumble upon in a friend’s bathroom. The “Jane” magazine cover
sports headlines such as “The 15 guys you’ll date & dump before you’re 30”, and “The big
holiday guide to Instant Beauty: Get dewy skin, sex-kitten hair and lips that stay up all night.” In
the bottom right corner, just below “Have fun and get fit: party your way to a better butt,” is a
headline that reads “Activism special: 5 women like you who are changing the world.” Inside,
the magazine features young white American women who are making their own “sweatshop
free” clothes, buying local organic food, renting their second homes out for below-market value,
and running a biodiesel station.

5 For example, a major anti-globalization protest that took place in September, 2003 in Cancun, Mexico, received
barely any mainstream Canadian media coverage, even after the dramatic ritual suicide of South Korean farmer Lee
Kyung-hae. Lee stabbed himself to death in the middle of a demonstration, to protest the treatment of farmers in the
global South by the World Trade Organization.
6 Anti-war protests have replaced anti-globalization demonstrations; tens of thousands of people around the world
protested the U.S. led war on Iraq in March, 2003, at the beginning of the Iraqi invasion, and have continued
annually since. These protests were also remarkable for receiving hardly any coverage in Canadian mainstream
media.
Although five years separate these disparate cultural representations of youth activism, it is my contention that they each signify relevant and related elements of what it means to take up youth citizenship through activism in the contemporary moment. On the one hand lies the depiction of young activists from the front page of the Globe and Mail, belonging to a long history of recurrent representations of “rowdy youth as animalistic and subhuman” (McRobbie, 1994, p. 206). On the other hand lies the Jane article’s image of youth activists as trendy, sexy, white, and middle class.\(^7\) In what ways might these two images – whilst still meant to impact on a particular audience in their own time – seem to co-exist, and what can their temporal presence tell us about the cultural pressures, including both sanctions and merits, of being a ‘youth activist’ today?

\(^7\) Also of interest is that the mainstream media representations focus on young men, whereas the Jane article is about young women. This strikes me as not coincidental. The gendered aspects of contemporary youth activism and notions of the ‘young citizen’ will be further developed throughout the thesis, in their relation to class and race.
The above images serve as one backdrop to the present ethnography, ever present in my mind as I carried out my field work and endeavored to make sense of what it means to be a youth activist today. They represent symbolic markers of the very dilemmas I encountered in the cultural world of activism which, in turn, substantially shaped the research questions that drove this study. These questions, further developed in each of the chapters to come, are as follows: (i) What might be some of the cultural, symbolic and subcultural elements of contemporary Canadian youth activism at the turn of the 21st century? (ii) What part does the idealized ‘good citizen’ play in configuring the cultural modes of operation within contemporary youth activist subcultures? And (iii) What are the modalities of action available to Canadian young people to permit their participation in dissident citizenship?

1.3 Context and background: Canadian neoliberalism and its effects on youth

I chose youth activist groups involved in challenging the politics of globalization, poverty, war and/or colonialism because of their explicit opposition to elements of the Canadian state, and to its increasingly neoliberal policy directives. The context of Canadian neoliberalism is thus central not only to the wider cultural sphere through which young people pass as they move towards adulthood; it also functions as one of the major ideological forces against which many of the participants in this study are aligned.

I use the term ‘neoliberalism’ here to signify the set of economic, policy, and political practices that incorporate radical efforts to liberalize markets (and thus create ‘free markets’). This has generally been achieved through economic deregulation, elimination of tariffs, and cuts

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8 By ‘subcultures’ here I mean those groups within which young people circulate; though the borders are often porous and fluid, I draw on the language of ‘subcultures’ as a convenient term for indicating that this is an identifiable group that generally sees itself as distinct from the ‘mainstream.’ Further discussion of this term and its history will take place in the Literature Review in this chapter and in Chapter 3.
to social and health services (Brown, 2005). It also refers to what Wendy Brown (2005) calls a “political rationality” (p. 38) that organizes these policies, and “carries a social analysis that, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire” (Brown, 2005, p. 39).  

Like many Western liberal democratic states over the last thirty years, Canada has increasingly embraced neoliberal practices that have resulted in retrenchment policies in everything from housing to education to welfare. Most noticeably arising in the early 1980s under the federal Progressive Conservatives and Brian Mulroney, the intervening twenty-five years have seen colossal cuts to social services, increasing liberalization of trade, the privatization of such common resources as energy and water, and anti-union legislation at both provincial and federal levels (Bashevkin, 2000; Canadian Labour Congress, 2003, June 10th; Carroll & Jones, 2000; Council of Canadians, 2001; Dobbin, 2003). Alongside these cuts and priority shifts, urban homelessness has risen (Hargrave, 1999), and student debt and youth unemployment have increased inexorably (Beauvais, McKay, & Seddon, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2004). Canada is also witnessing an increasingly strained health care system (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2002).

The Canadian political and economic context can be understood as part of a larger, and highly mobile global structure of ‘liberalization’ operating in the affluent West, that has disciplined countries around the world into reducing public services and opening their borders to trade. This disciplining and economic re-ordering is built upon previous histories of colonialist expansion and exploitation, and serves to reinforce and maintain global power inequalities (Anderson and Cavanaugh, 2000; Bello, 2000; Chomsky, 1999). Within this global milieu,
young people are differently advantaged and disadvantaged depending on their particular location in the social structure, whether that be class, ethnicity, geography, or gender, to name a few of the salient contexts. In Canada, as in many globalized countries of the North, the gap is growing between those who can succeed within the ‘global marketplace’ and those who fall through its ever-widening cracks.10

Of the three Canadian cities within which this research was carried out, each has experienced retrenchment policies at different points over the last two decades, although each has followed roughly similar paths towards neoliberalism. Toronto, Canada’s largest urban centre, is located in the province of Ontario, which is the most populous in the country and widely considered to be at the centre of national economic activity. Of the three urban centres examined here, Toronto was the earliest to be engulfed in neoliberal policies, when the Progressive Conservatives under Premier Mike Harris first came to power in 1995. Claiming a ‘Common Sense Revolution,’ the Harris Conservatives quickly gutted social and health services in the province, instituting wide-spread retrenchment policies that resulted in substantially heightening social stratification (Keil, 2002). Vancouver, in Canada’s westernmost province of British Columbia, began its move towards neoliberalism in earnest at a provincial level in 2001, when the Liberals were elected under Premier Gordon Campbell (Kershaw, 2004). Following an almost identical trajectory to that carried out by the Conservatives in Ontario, the BC Liberals quickly began to dismantle what had once been one of the strongest social security nets in the

10 The disparity between youth who are able to find success within Canada and youth who are not can be seen perhaps most starkly in statistics associated with youth incarceration – of which Canada has one of the highest rates in the world, higher even than the U.S. For example, of youth who are incarcerated, 33 % are Aboriginal, even though Aboriginal youth comprise only 5% of the population (Dean, 2002). Another example of this disparity can be found in a study of Canadian young adults (ages 20-24) with low levels of education; the study found that young people who had not completed high school were 22% less likely to be employed than their peers who had a high school or trade vocational diploma, and 28% less likely to be employed than their peers with a post-secondary education. The study noted that this gap was higher than that for many other OECD countries (de Broucker, 2005). A recently released report card on child poverty in Canada (Campaign 2000, 2007) notes that child poverty rates are the same today as they were in 1989, despite a 50% real increase in the size of the economy over that period.
country (Fuller, 2001). Montreal, located in the predominantly French-speaking province of Quebec, began to experience the pressures of neoliberalism immediately following the 1995 referendum on sovereignty, when Lucien Bouchard became the leader of the provincial Parti Québécois amidst promises to reduce taxes and become ‘fiscally responsible’ (Robert, 1997). Although relatively shielded from the worst excesses of neoliberalism by a strong tradition of social networks and a history of dissent against English Canada’s policy directions (Anonymous, 2002), Montreal and the province of Quebec have nonetheless continued along the neoliberal trajectory mapped out within the rest of the country, strengthened by the 2003 election of the provincial Liberal party under Jean Charest (formerly a federal Progressive Conservative). Each incursion of neoliberalism has been vigorously protested in all three provinces, ranging from Toronto’s Metro Days of Action (Conway, 2004) to Quebec’s province-wide student strike against tuition hikes in 2005 and British Columbia’s ongoing mobilizations by unions and social justice organizations against welfare retrenchment, cuts to health care and homelessness. In spite of these public protests and actions, neoliberalism retains substantial power as a governing ideology within each province.

The neoliberal context described above is the spatial and ideological location through which the young activists within this study have both come of age and come to their political activities. As such, it is an important locus of investigation into both their modes of resistance, and their sense of themselves (or subjectivities) that they have developed within the Canadian nation-state. As will be described in greater detail in the next chapter, neoliberalism, as a set of political priorities, also comes with an associated set of individual characteristics, the adoption of which enables it to proceed; this is what Nikolas Rose (1999) has termed ‘neoliberal subjectivity.’ Liberalism, its antecedent and ongoing ideological camouflage (Brown, 2005), also
comes with a set of ideal characteristics, the legacy of which is still powerfully present today. Thus neoliberalism is relevant not only as a political and economic ideology, but also needs to be seen as fundamentally cultural and symbolic because of its impact on the everyday, and what this might mean for the young people growing up in its shadow.

1.4 Literature Review

To locate this study within current literature, I’ve narrowed my review to three specific areas: youth subcultural theory, literature concerned with youth and citizenship, and new social movement theory. The first area, youth subcultural theory, has developed over the last thirty years or so and primarily addresses questions about youth subjectivities, youth subcultural affiliations, and youth cultures more generally. Drawing largely upon the conceptual framings of cultural theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Williams, as well as political philosopher Louis Althusser (and to a lesser extent, Michel Foucault), scholars in this field have attempted to make sense of how youth subcultural affiliations can be understood in relation to larger social inequities. A different area of literature, one I have called ‘youth citizenship studies,’ attempts to address questions of young people’s relationship to the nation-state, and how the state attempts to shape this relationship through, for example, citizenship education. This literature is located, with some exceptions, largely within the field of education and draws upon political theories of citizenship and democracy. Finally, because this is a project about youth activists, I address the potential and limitations of theories of social movements for the conceptual apparatus of this project.
1.4.1 Youth subcultures

The classic literature on youth subcultures, largely coming from the now-defunct Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Britain during the 1970s, has little to say about youth activism. What scant mention that is made either dismisses youth activists as middle-class hippies trying to escape dreary lives (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 1976) or makes mention of their actions only in passing as part of a larger and more coherent social movement (Cohen, 1997). Contemporary literature on youth subcultures has made some inroads into documenting the lives and values of youth activist communities, although such efforts have generally been the unexpected offshoots of larger research projects concerned with youth cultures more generally. Julie Bettie (2003) describes the activist aspirations of middle class Mexican-American girls in a rural California school, as part of her larger ethnography of working class and middle class girls in that community. Kevin McDonald (1999) devotes one chapter of his book on youth subjectivities to Aboriginal youth activists in Australia. Anita Harris (2004) makes brief mention of youth activism in the final chapter of her book on young women in the twenty-first century, as one way in which youth are responding to neoliberal social pressures and the privatization of the public sphere. Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garofalo (1998) published an article about young women involved in the “Riot Grrrl” movement, discussing their views of feminism and the possibility for empowerment through self-published “zines.” Various other studies have also addressed youth activism (Edwards and Mercer, 2007; Ginwright, 2007; Harris, 2001; Maralee, 2006; Wilson, 2002a); while each offer insight into youth activist practices, none of them represent a sustained attempt to make sense of Canadian youth activist lives as a cultural and symbolic formation with its associated phenomenologies of
meaning, nor do they attempt to understand the formation of young peoples’ ‘political subjectivities’ as emerging from within both subcultures and the wider cultural realm.

Although the classic texts of youth subcultural theory may not have engaged in a sustained attempt at understanding youth activists, they were centrally concerned with the notion of resistance. From Paul Willis’s account of the working-class ‘Lads’ apparently sabotaging their education in an attempt to respond to class conflicts (1977), to Dick Hebdige’s mods, teddy boys, and punks enacting their own forms of working class ‘Refusal’ through spectacular subcultural styles (1979), the classic literature on youth subcultures has made many attempts to theorize youth resistance. Indeed, one of the founding texts of youth subcultural literature is entitled Resistance through rituals (Hall and Jefferson, 1976).

More recent youth subcultural work has also focused on youth resistance from outside an activist framework. Brian Wilson (2002b) develops five theses of youth resistance through their participation in rave subcultures, including what he calls “purposeful-tactical resistance,” “reactive-adaptive resistance,” “trivial resistance,” “self-aware and oblivious non-resistance,” and “reproduction of the dominant culture” (Wilson, 2002b, p 383). Angela McRobbie (1994) describes youth subcultures in terms of resistance, but within what she calls a “more mundane, micrological level of everyday practices” (p. 162). Shane Blackman (1998) elaborates on this aspect of resistance in his ethnographic study of the ‘New Wave Girls,’ an “academic and resistant youth cultural group inside a secondary school” (p. 207) in the south of England. He suggests that the term ‘resistance’ is useful because it demonstrates the “real degree of struggle

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11 Phil Cohen (1997), in particular, developed the idea of youth cultures as containing their own symbolic and ritualistic elements, with their own logic and meaning, as perceived by the young people themselves. This idea was further expanded by Dillabough, Gardner, and McLeod (2005) with the use of the concept phenomenologies of meaning. This refers to the ways in which young people come to make meaning of their own lives and experiences within the larger social context. See also Dillabough, Wang, and Kennelly, 2005.
and challenge with respect to family, school, and masculinity” (p. 211) experienced by the girls of his study.

While such accounts can be useful for understanding the ways in which youth practice resistance on a daily level, they do little to illuminate the more intentional and politicized forms of resistance practiced by youth activists. Indeed, such accounts can serve to obscure the value of politicized resistance, by rendering every act engaged in by young people as a form of resistance and thus making no act a form of resistance (Katz, 2004). Thus while youth subcultural theorists have covered some important ground in considering the role of ‘resistance’ in youth subcultures, an account of young people involved in more conscious, strategic forms of resistance (as political engagement) could helpfully expand this field of knowledge, as well as reveal other implications for youth subcultural groupings.

In addition to our shared concern with ‘resistance,’ the other major element borrowed from youth subcultural theory within this thesis is the very concept of ‘subculture’ itself. This is drawn largely from classic literature on youth subcultures (e.g. Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 1976; Cohen, 1997; McRobbie, 1991; Willis, 1977). Following Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts, I understand ‘culture’ to refer to the ways in which “groups ‘handle’ the raw material of their social and material existence…A culture includes the ‘maps of meaning’ which make things intelligible to its members” (1976, p. 10). Existing within and in relation to what Cohen (1997) and Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts (1976) refer to as the “parent culture,” youth subcultures are “focused around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artifacts, territorial spaces etc which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture” (Clarke et al, 1976, p. 14). In other words, subcultures exist in relation to the wider culture, whilst

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12 As Cindi Katz points out: “We cannot understand oppositional practice or its possible effects if we consider every autonomous act to be an instance of resistance…When almost anything can be constructed as an ‘oppositional practice,’ I find myself bored and unconvinced” (Katz, 2004, p. 242).
simultaneously carving out alternative ‘maps of meaning’ (Cohen, 1997) by which they can make the larger social realities intelligible to themselves. Such a process of meaning-making, or what Dillabough, Gardner and McLeod (2005) refer to as *phenomenologies of meaning* (see also Dillabough, Wang, & Kennelly, 2005), are an essential part of what marks subcultures as separate from the parent culture to which they are related.

While I have chosen to draw on youth subcultural literature, and thus adopt the language of ‘subcultures,’ it is important to note the debates that have emerged over the last thirty years about the relevance and utility of this concept. In particular, there has been extensive debate on what constitutes a ‘subculture,’ and on whether it can be constructively used in considering young people’s social affiliations. Some theorists have suggested that terms such as youth “lifestyle” or “neo-tribe” might better capture the fluid nature of youth cultural affiliations (Bennett & Kahn-Harris, 2004b). There is concern that the notion of ‘subculture’ tends to reify youth cultural affiliations, painting them as more cohesive and internally consistent than they actually are. Peter J. Martin offers one resolution to this dilemma, pointing out that the notion of subcultures (and other collective groupings) is “useful not as definitions of identifiable groups but rather as *symbolic representations* of fluid, sometimes even amorphous, sets of social relations” (Martin, 2004, p. 26). He suggests that the amorphous and fluid nature of subcultures does not negate their theoretical utility for at least two reasons: first, that “the designation of certain [youth] ‘groups’ – especially if these are portrayed as being threatening or harmful – is a frequent and often consequential tactic of the mass media” (Martin, 2004, p. 33), and second, “the identification of such groups may be an important, if more diffuse, way in which individuals can experience a sense of inclusion or exclusion, and a corresponding sense of identity” (Martin, 2004, p. 33). We can see the former consequence of popular perceptions of youth activist
subcultures emerging in media depictions of rampaging youth being restrained by armoured police (see image on page 3). The latter utility of subcultures is one that I will explore below, through my data on activist youth who do, to a certain extent, seek each other out in order to experience a “sense of inclusion” and a “corresponding sense of identity,” and who likewise experience being excluded from the subcultural group.

One further dilemma exists in my use of the term ‘subculture’ to describe youth activist affiliations. In the classic subcultural literature, ‘parent culture’ refers to the particular class location in which the young people and their families are embedded. From within this tradition, the notion of ‘subculture’ is explicitly and exclusively linked to the lives of working class youth. Cohen states, “I do not think the middle class produces subcultures, for subcultures are produced by a dominated culture, not by a dominant culture” (1997, p. 61). Counter to this interpretation, although aligned with it in one sense, I would suggest that subcultures can emerge from the middle classes, if they exist in subordinate relation to the dominant culture. In other words, I agree with Cohen’s interpretation that subcultures cannot emerge from within the dominant culture; I do not agree, however, that membership in the middle classes automatically aligns with belonging to a dominant culture. In considering the young people involved with activist subcultures, many (though not all) of whom come from middle class backgrounds, I would suggest that it is their position in opposition to the dominant culture that situates them as belonging to a subculture. While middle class members of the subculture do have greater mobility in the form of cultural (and material) capital, they exist, for now, in a genuine relation of subordination to the dominant culture – the dominant culture being, in this case, one in which their political beliefs and values are largely unrepresented and dismissed or even ridiculed.
1.4.2 Youth citizenship studies

Another important aspect of this project is to investigate the meanings associated with youth citizenship in the contemporary moment. This focus has arisen in response to the fact that young people engaged in activist practices are participating as such in a public sphere of contestation. Rather than being in the schools (Bettie, 2003; Willis, 1977), night clubs and raves (Thornton, 1996; Redhead, 1993; Wilson, 2002, 2006), or bedrooms (McRobbie, 1991) of other youth cultures that have been examined by scholars, these young people take up their place within activist subcultures through direct engagement (whether it be confrontational or not) with the Canadian state. As such, it seemed important to better understand how youth citizenship might be imagined, portrayed, and represented within the cultural sphere, and what influence this has had on young people themselves.

Turning to the literature that exists on the relationship between ‘youth’ and ‘citizenship,’ one of the major focuses in recent years has been on the ‘problem’ of youth engagement in the polity. Beginning from the premise that young people are fundamentally lacking in citizenship skills (hence supposedly explaining dropping voter turnouts amongst young voters across Western liberal democracies (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006; Pammett & LeDuc, 2003)), this body of literature focuses on strategies for remedying this apparent civic deficit (Chamberlin, 2003; Criddle, Vidovich, & O’Neill, 2004; Y. Hébert, 1997; Levinson, 2003; Osborne, 2000; Osler & Starkey, 2003). While there have been a range of calls for different forms of citizenship education, from “moral education” (Davies, Gorard, & McGuinn, 2005) to “global education” (Osler & Starkey, 2003), much of this literature has been marked by a troubling lack of reflection on the historical and contemporary meanings of the term. In addition, some scholars place ‘youth activism’ within a straight-forward trajectory of political
socialization that will lead the young people to become ‘better citizens,’ by integrating them ‘deeply into our social traditions’ (Yates & Younnis, 1999). This conception of youth activism is, however, often conflated with participation in normative community organizations that are generally not employing oppositional positions to the nation-state.

Although in the minority, a body of literature also exists that addresses the relationship between youth and citizenship in more critical ways. Such literature is concerned with how calls for youth citizenship often overlook the structured ways in which some young people are able to participate whereas others are systematically excluded (Carroll & Jones, 2000; Leighton, 2004). It is also concerned with how an apolitical, individualistic conception of citizenship can become inscribed onto young people (Harris, 2004; Mitchell, 2003). Finally, this work recognizes how citizenship has come to be conflated with duties and responsibilities, rather than rights and entitlements to protections (Best, 2003; France, 1998; Hall, Coffey, & Williamson, 1999). It is this latter body of literature that I take as a base in considering the relationship between young activists and the Canadian nation-state.

At this level of analysis, my argument is that the forms of neoliberal subjectivity that have been identified by Rose and others (as will be outlined in chapter 2) are played out and operate within contemporary notions of citizenship that are nurtured and encouraged for young Canadians, through structures such as schooling and the media. I draw here upon Katharyne Mitchell’s (2003) study of the evolution of citizenship education across three countries – Canada, Britain, and the United States – which concludes that emerging forms of education are deeply neoliberal in nature, so that “educating a child to be a good citizen is no longer synonymous with constituting a well-rounded, nationally oriented, multicultural self, but rather about attainment of the ‘complex skills’ necessary for individual success in a global economy” (2003, p. 399). Along
similar lines, Anita Harris’s (2004) study of the construction of girlhood in the 21st century notes that new forms of youth citizenship are “constituted around responsibilities rather than rights, managed forms of participation, and consumption” (2004, p. 63). These individualizing forms of citizenship, I will argue, can ultimately serve to obscure, for young people, the possibility of taking the kind of political action which might be necessary to challenge the state when its actions and/or policies are contrary to public beliefs and values (see also Kennelly & Dillabough, forthcoming).

From the critical literature concerned with the relationship between youth and citizenship, then, I expand upon the following ideas: (a) the concepts of ‘youth’ and ‘citizenship’ rest in an uneasy relationship with each other that demand unpacking and troubling before any calls for the development of ‘youth citizenship’ can be given serious attention; and (b) even if ‘youth citizenship’ were to be rendered comprehensible through such analysis, it is neither a straightforward outcome nor an unambiguous goal of such state interventions as ‘citizenship education.’ Rather than taking ‘youth citizenship’ to be a desirable political end in any straightforward manner, I focus here on how the symbolic elements associated with the desire for youthful citizenship function, at least in part, to placate youth activism into acceptable forms of liberal individualism.

1.4.3 Social movement theory

The final body of literature that needs to be addressed is that field of study known as “new social movement” theory (or NSM). Given my focus on activism, some might wonder why I have not foregrounded my study within this literature in order to address my research questions. The strength of much of the new social movement literature that I have encountered lies in
compelling analyses of the collective phenomenon of social action; it focuses less on the internal, symbolic, and cultural aspects of participation in activist cultures. In other words, social movement theory tends to analyze these phenomena from a *macro* rather than a *micro* level. The focus of social movement theory, whether it be the resource mobilization (RM) theories of the 1970s and 1980s (Tilley, 1978, 1985; Zald & McCarthy, 1979) or the new social movement theories of the 1980s and beyond (Melucci, 1989; Touraine, 1981, 1988), have focused on the impact of collective actors organizing around economic, political, or cultural issues (Carroll & Jones, 2000). Even the most recent iteration within this body of literature, which has begun to make use of the term ‘contentious politics’ in place of ‘social movements’ (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007), remains focused on the macro and the global, rather than on the individual actors, their relations to others and their associated places within the cultural sphere.

While much of NSM literature focuses on the macro elements of social change movements, there are some texts that consider elements more closely associated with the concerns of this thesis. For example, an edited text called *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics* (Aminzade et al., 2001), examines cultural dynamics within both social movements and collective entities that might not be identified as social movements (e.g. religious groups). The essays within explore the effects of emotions, temporality, and leadership, amongst other sociological themes. Similar to this thesis, various of the chapters are concerned with questions about the influence of macro and micro forces, structure versus agency, and the impacts of collective movements on social change. Another recent text, entitled *Self, Identity and Social Movements* (Stryker, Owens, & White, 2000), is also concerned with similar themes of selfhood and identity within social movements. It asks questions about why some people join social movements while others with similar ideologies do not, and why some leave movements.
sooner than others, questions that this thesis can also be seen to address. While broadly related, theme-wise, to the concerns of this dissertation, these texts remain committed to epistemological approaches that draw upon quite different theoretical traditions than the ones I am using here – that is, they are not framing their studies within an ethnographic, subcultural studies context and have yet, for example, to explore the topic of activism from the vantage point of cultural phenomenology. Specifically, there is little mention of class or ‘race,’ or the symbolic elements of everyday cultures and their influence on youth subjectivities, such as is the focus for Nikolas Rose, Pierre Bourdieu and the youth subcultural theorists that this thesis draws upon.

The texts named above look at a range of social movements from around the world. There are other texts which are more concerned with the areas and movements from which I have drawn my participants, specifically anti-globalization, anti-poverty, anti-colonialism, and anti-war movements as they have manifested within Western Liberal democracies such as Canada. A recent Canadian text entitled Gramsci is Dead: anarchist undercurrents in the newest social movements (Day, 2005) focuses on the most recent manifestations of social movement organizing, including anti-globalization actions such as those in Seattle and Quebec, as well as the emergence of Indymedia Centres, and Canadian activist organizations such as OCAP (the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty) and NOII (No One Is Illegal). Day’s main argument is that these movements are shifting away from the hegemonic strands found within classical Marxist organizing and towards more pluralist, anarchist modes of action. While a fascinating and thought-provoking read, once again Day’s focus and areas of emphasis are fundamentally different from my own. The same can be said of Kevin McDonald’s (1999) Global Movements: Action and Culture, and Amory Starr’s (2001) Naming the Enemy: Anti-corporate movements confront globalization. While each speak to and about the larger movements with which many of
my participants identify, they are not approaching their questions through the lenses of phenomenology and cultural studies, nor are they seeking to understand the symbolic dimensions of youth activism or its forms of classification (see Bourdieu, 1984).

In essence, the reason that social movement theory is of less relevance to my work than might be thought of a thesis on ‘youth activism’ is that ultimately I am not trying to describe or locate a phenomenon called a ‘social movement.’ Rather, I am concerned with the subcultural manifestation of a specific identity called ‘activist’ taken up by young people in response to various cultural, social, and political contexts in which they find themselves. While concerned with questions of social change and justice, this project is ultimately focused more on the cultural realm, and what this means for who is able to participate in youth activist subcultures, and who, on the other hand, is excluded. In other words, the research turns upon profoundly sociological and cultural questions which stand outside the boundaries of what is defined as, or constitutes, a social movement.

1.5 Summary and key arguments: cultural histories and symbolic landscapes of ‘citizen youth’

I began this chapter with two media images which, taken together, provide a visual representation of some of the dilemmas and contradictions that inform the questions which drive this research project. On the one hand, we witness the figure of the young activist as troublemaker and hooligan, disrupting the apparently legitimate practices of the state. On the other, we see the young activist as desirable, stylish, and chic, complying with middle class codes of accomplishment and consumption, and mobilizing the fashionable aspects of activist scripts through acts of charity that do little to challenge state inequalities. One response to these disparate representations is to see them as not, in fact, contradictory, but rather as representing
the symbolic accommodation of activism into liberal democratic codes that allow it to be placated and, when necessary, policed into acceptable forms of youth citizenship. Through the lens of phenomenology and the tools of ethnography, this thesis will attempt to account for the current configurations of this context as it is expressed by youth activists, as well as trace, where possible, the cultural effects of both the historical and contemporary ‘good citizen’ on Canadian youth activist subcultures.

Ultimately, the core arguments that I make in this thesis are that (i) the construction of the ‘good (youth) citizen,’ as a historical effect and a contemporary cultural symbol, plays a regulating role within youth activist subcultures, emerging as a ‘structure of feeling’\(^\text{13}\) that shapes young people’s responses to each other, to the state, and to the cultural field of activism; (ii) in partial response to this historical and cultural context, contemporary youth subcultural activism has come to be grounded in exclusionary forms of social conflict, specifically along the lines of ‘race’ and class, although these elements tend to be masked both within and outside of youth activist subcultures; and (iii) the cultural field of youth activism functions such that young people often come to activism through relational, interactional processes that, while embedded within the constraining features of a regulated social world, also open up possibilities for emergent practices and strengthened political opposition to unjust state structures.

To explore these claims and respond to the research questions, the thesis is divided into eight chapters. In chapters 2 and 3, I describe in detail the theoretical framework I bring to bear on my research questions (Chapter 2) and the methodology and methods used to investigate them.

\(^{13}\) Structure of feeling was first coined by Raymond Williams (1977), and refers to the structural constraints within which people’s personal experiences take place. I shall elaborate upon it further in the next chapter and in Chapter 5.

\(^{14}\) The term is used here in keeping with Bourdieu’s theoretical account of field, which will be further elaborated in the next chapter and in Chapter 6.
(Chapter 3). My theoretical approach draws upon an interdisciplinary frame that combines the cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and various youth theorists (e.g. Bettie, 2003; Thornton, 1996), the political sociology of Nikolas Rose, and the work of feminist political philosophers such as Wendy Brown, Lois McNay and Terry Lovell. Broadly speaking, I see the theory and methodology as joined through a phenomenological and hermeneutic lens which incorporates a Ricoeurian ‘detour’ – a process by which to highlight the connections and symbolic mediations between apparently unrelated elements of the social world in order to reveal new insights into the genesis of contemporary social problems.

In Chapter 4, I discuss in more detail the speckled past of the contemporary ‘good citizen,’ taking my ‘detour’ (Ricoeur, 1998 (1981)) through the history of citizenship education within Canada, and its relation to colonialism, racism, and classism. This chapter frames the historical context alongside a discourse analysis of current citizenship education curricular documents, as one way of assessing both the past and present of the ‘good (youth) citizen’ within Canada.

In Chapter 5, we encounter for the first time the narratives of the young activists who participated in this research. I draw upon these narratives to explore how the various institutional sites of governance – including education, media, and policing – have impacted young activists’ sense of their own citizenship and their relation to each other and the state. Through this analysis, I seek to expose the continuities and disjunctures between historical and contemporary representations of the ‘good citizen,’ and what this means for young people coming to activism.

In Chapter 6, I continue this exploration by investigating the more everyday cultures of youth activism within an increasingly neoliberal Canadian state. Within this chapter, I show
precisely how youth activist subcultures are sometimes implicated in, and sometimes inadvertently reproduce, the very forms of exclusion they are seeking on a conscious level to contest. Drawing on Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus, field, and authorized language*, I examine the embeddedness of youth activist practices in larger political and cultural frames, looking critically at the question of *who* has the capacity to participate in activist politics, and who, on the other hand, does not have access to the particular cultural resources necessary to become ‘the activist’. I then move forward to connect this cultural analysis to the historical and contemporary influences of dominant constructions of the ‘good citizen,’ in order to investigate as far as possible the quite new premises and boundaries framing cultural elements of youth activist cultures within a high modern, neoliberal state. I am particularly interested in the ways in which youth activism exists as a specific cultural phenomenon within the contemporary moment, seeing it as one response to the increasingly pervasive pressure on young Canadians to become a particular kind of ‘good citizen,’ and how, as such, it ultimately carries with it both emancipatory and restrictive potentials.

Finally, in keeping with the potential and associated possibilities for new concepts of freedom (see Brown, 2005; Rose, 1999) and political engagement, in Chapter 7 I move forward to consider the ways in which young people embrace the potential and modalities of action, even in the face of both overwhelming cultural constraints and the raced and classed limits of activist cultures. Building on the work of feminist theorists and sociologists concerned with questions of agency, I argue for a revised understanding of the potential for political agency amongst young people, one which accounts for the material and symbolic constraints to youth citizenship as well as the fluidity inherent to a social space constituted in part through inter-personal relationships. Turning in particular to a notion of a *relational modality of agency*, I offer an empirical and
theoretical account of how young people can come to alternative forms of political engagement which challenge wider injustices, and are able to continue the important work of advocating for progressive social change.
2 THEORIZING CITIZEN YOUTH: GOVERNMENTALITY, THE CULTURAL ORDINARY, AND AGENCY

In an effort to develop a socio-cultural analysis of youth activist subcultures that can both address their relationship to the nation-state, as well as account for resistance, regulation/governance and reproduction within the doxic field, I necessarily draw upon an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I draw on the scholarship of Pierre Bourdieu and Nikolas Rose to develop a cultural account of the nation-state, in order to better understand the role played by the broader cultural realm in shaping youth activist subjectivities. The second section is dedicated to the conceptual work of Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Williams, as well as youth theorists Sarah Thornton and Julie Bettie. The concepts developed by these theorists are helpful in explicating how the relationship between individual, state, and culture play out at the level of the every day. Arguing that Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* can be understood as the sociological means through which Foucault’s and Rose’s *governmentality* is carried out within the realm of the ‘cultural ordinary’ (Williams, 1989), this aspect of the framework offers some explanations as to how youth activist cultures continue to be implicated in forms of exclusion built largely around class and ‘race’ concerns. Finally, the third section is dedicated to feminist theorists of agency, in order to explain how individuals come to oppositional activist practices, even in the face of overwhelming cultural constraints. Building upon a modality of agency that has at its base an

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15 Bourdieu describes *doxa* as ‘a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma.’ (1997, p 15). Every field has its own specific *doxa*, which incorporate a “set of inseparably cognitive and evaluative presuppositions whose acceptance is implied in membership itself” (Bourdieu, 1997, p 100). The concept of *doxa* will be further elaborated within this chapter, and in Chapter 6.

16 Raymond Williams (1989) uses the concept of the ‘cultural ordinary’ to highlight the ways in which culture belongs to everyone at every level of society, thus decoupling the notion of ‘culture’ from its elite history within the arts and leisure practices of the upper classes.

17 By putting ‘race’ in single quotes, I follow a long-established feminist tradition that uses such quotes to mark the fact of the social construction of the category of ‘race’ (see, for example, Mohanty, 1991).
interactional or relational component, I see this final contribution as the key location through which my argument gains a theoretical momentum that ultimately and necessarily moves beyond critique. Although this chapter sketches the contours of each of these theoretical components, it is important to note that each receives further elaboration throughout the thesis, as they are brought to bear within the data. Thus, this chapter is intended as a scaffold to guide the reader through the theoretical framework that is developed in greater detail within the chapters that follow.

2.1 Late modernity, neoliberalism, and the state: theoretical conceptions and problematics in relation to young people

As noted by many social theorists, the contemporary moment is marked by particular conditions, labeled alternatively (and sometimes interchangeably) as ‘modernity’ (Bauman, 2004), ‘late modernity’ (Young, 1999), ‘postmodernity’ (Scott-Bauman, 2003) and/or ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1999). Young people are often seen to be at the front edge of the shifting conditions of contemporary society, perceived as both the creators and casualties of changing times (Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000; Bynner, Chisholm, & Furlong, 1997). These conditions include, but are not limited to, increasing economic stratification, impending threats of environmental devastation, mass global migration, and such supra-national threats as ‘terrorism.’ Theorists of modernity have identified the parallel subjectivities that have emerged in high modern times as being marked by individualism, alienation and depoliticized relations to the state (Brown, 1995; Bauman, 2004). Various studies have noted the ways in which these characteristics have been taken up by young people in industrialized countries around the world, with a variety of consequences (Dillabough & Kennelly, under review; Luttrell, 1996).
A key argument that I am making, following Nikolas Rose who built upon the work of Michel Foucault, is that the modern liberal/neoliberal nation-state plays an integral role in shaping these forms of youth subjectivity, as one mode through which the population might be regulated to perform in accordance with the demands of capitalist expansion. Many theorists agree that the modern nation-state is inextricably bound to the conditions of modernity, in various ways working to support and uphold structures that seem linked to an ever-increasing sense of isolation, insignificance, and political futility (Hall, Held, Hubert & Thompson, 1995; Bauman, 2004). Generating “historically unprecedented discourses of individual liberty” (Brown, 1995, p. xi), some theorists suggest that the modern nation-state produces systems and structures that continually work to undermine genuine political participation for all but the most elite members of the polity (Brown, 2002; Hernández, 1997). It achieves these apparently contradictory ends through recourse to discourses of ‘choice’ and individual ‘responsibility’ that have become increasingly pervasive as neoliberal structures of governance achieve greater ascendancy (Brown, 1995; Curtis, 1999; Hernández, 1997).

Within this context of late modernity, how can we understand the ways in which young people encounter and are influenced by the nation-state? Further, how can such an explanation take into account the pervasive cultural impacts of prevailing state ideologies, without being reduced to a simple deterministic account of youth lives? To address those aspects of the thesis which are concerned with the role of the nation-state, I draw upon the work of various theorists who have attempted to make sense of the cultural impact of the state.
2.1.1. The cultural role of the state

In an introductory chapter to a book about Bourdieu’s contributions to democratic politics, Loïc Wacquant explains that Bourdieu understood the state as not only a political entity, but as a cultural one:

[T]he state does not only exist ‘out there,’ in the guise of bureaucracies, authorities, and ceremonies: it also lives ‘in here,’ ineffaceably engraved in all of us in the form of the state-sanctioned mental categories acquired via schooling through which we cognitively construct the social world, so that we already consent to its dictates prior to committing any ‘political’ act (Wacquant, 2005b, p. 17).

This perspective on the state echoes the work of Louis Althusser, a Marxist scholar who was highly influential for thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault as they developed their theories of the state. Althusser (2004 (1970)) developed the concept of ideological state apparatuses (or ISAs) in response to the structural limits he perceived in Marxist and political theory which treated the state primarily as an economic engine or policy-making entity. Rather, he came to understand the state as being the cultural author of particular ideological perspectives, which could be used to uphold its interests. He saw the ideological state apparatuses as one half of a system that was upheld on the other side by coercive state apparatuses, which include such structures as military and policing. Unlike these overt forms of coercion, he saw ideological state apparatuses as located within the diffuse cultural elements that make up a state -- the media, education, the family, and religion, to name a few. This concept permits a more complex assessment of the role of the state in subject-formation, recognizing that we are not free-floating entities within the socio-cultural field, but that, rather, there are specific ways in which we are influenced by certain social conditions, including, amongst other things, the overwhelming cultural impacts of the state, felt through structures such as schooling and policing, and
reinforced through ‘common sense’ cultural representations, such as those often found within mainstream media.

Althusser’s perspective has been widely critiqued for being excessively deterministic, for overstating the power and intentionality of the state, and for unduly constraining the subject to state-imposed ideological perspectives (Connell, 1979; Ferretter, 2006; Green, 1984). In spite of these critiques, the power of his insights retain currency, and can be found, in altered forms, in the writings of many scholars working on the relation between culture and the state (Foucault, 1994a; Hall, 1985). The strength of Althusser’s insight about the ideological state apparatus is that it expands the normative concept of the state as being confined solely to its political systems of governance. It also helps to explain the durability of certain forms of dominant ideologies, in spite of surface revisions such as the replacement of one political party with another. Finally, it links the seemingly impersonal structures of the state with those most private and personal elements of being human: one’s subjectivity. It is this link that has been helpfully expanded through Foucault’s work on governmentality, recently taken up and elaborated by Nikolas Rose.

2.1.2 Rose and governmentality

The concept of governmentality was developed by Michel Foucault relatively late in his career, and, as such, some scholars suggest that he was not able to elaborate the concept to its full potential (Brown, 1995). Foucault’s (1991) description of governmentality encompasses three levels: first of all, that it involves a “[state] ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power” which targets the population of a state (p. 102). He sees in this development an analogy with the forms of economy established within traditional
families, whereby “[t]o govern a state will therefore mean to apply economy…which means exercising towards its inhabitants…a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of a family over his household and his goods” (p. 92). Secondly, he understands governmentality to incorporate “the tendency which, over a long period and throughout the West, has steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline, etc.) of this type of power” (p. 102). That is, governmentality emerges as the dominant form of governance within the state. And thirdly, that this array of processes has resulted in the transformation of “the state of justice of the Middle Ages … into the administrative state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries” (p. 103); in other words, that the state looks fundamentally different in the wake of the shift in governance away from territory and towards ‘things’ and people that began to happen in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (cf p. 93).

Sociologist Nikolas Rose expanded upon Foucault’s work on governmentality in an effort to describe the contemporary development of ‘neoliberal subjectivities.’ Following Foucault, Rose (1992, 1993, 1999) argues that the advanced forms of liberalism that constitute the nature of the modern nation-state have emerged alongside a particular set of dilemmas about governing its citizens. Rather than resorting to previous forms of overt domination, the modern liberal state developed an apparatus of governance that operates through the “regulated choices of individual citizens” (Rose, 1993, p. 285). It does so by seeking to detach the systems of authority from political rule and instead locating them “within a market governed by the rationalities of competition, accountability, and consumer demand” (ibid). Thus the human subject is expected to become self-governing, in ways which uphold, legitimate and perpetuate the actions of the state. As Rose writes,

Those mechanisms and devices operating according to a disciplinary logic, from the school to the prison, seek to produce the subjective conditions, the forms of

Rose notes that one of the means by which liberal states legitimate their existence, and ensure their reproduction, is through “effecting a division between the civilized member of society and those lacking the capacity to exercise their citizenship” (p. 291). The liberal state depends on devices, including schooling, prisons, and the family, to “create individuals who do not need to be governed by others, but will govern themselves, master themselves, care for themselves” (ibid).

Neoliberalism, as a form of intensified advanced liberalism, Rose argues, has developed particularly powerful forms of governmentality that build upon and extend the prior incarnations of liberal governmentality. He writes:

Neo-liberalism was potent because it did not merely articulate a range of familiar criticisms of welfare – its cost, its bureaucracy, its granting of discretionary authority to unaccountable professionals and administrators, its paternalism, its inequity, its crushing of autonomy – but managed to turn these criticisms governmental – that is to say, to render them technical (1993, p. 294)

These particular “technical” aspects, not new to neoliberalism but finding new life in its specific ideology, include monetarization, marketization, enhancement of the powers of the consumer, financial accountability and audit (ibid). In relation to the production of particular forms of citizenship, neoliberalism has been successful in integrating at every level of society a concept of the citizen as a “highly individualized consumer-citizen” (Bondi, 2005, p. 499). As Liz Bondi argues, such a form of subjectivity does not necessarily orient all people towards “narcissistic gratification of individual desires via market opportunities” (ibid); instead, and in a seeming paradox, it can act to support particular forms of political activism, “because activism depends, at least to some extent, on belief in the forms of subjectivity that enable people to make choices.
about their lives” (ibid). Such activism is necessarily limited within the context of a neoliberal state however, as neoliberalism and its associated focus on meritocratic individualism “reduces political citizenship to an unprecedented degree of political passivity and complacency” (Brown, 2005, p. 43). As Wendy Brown notes,

A fully realized neoliberal citizenry would be the opposite of public-minded; indeed, it would barely exist as a public. The body politic ceases to be a body but is rather a group of individual entrepreneurs and consumers (2005, p. 43).

Taken together, Bourdieu’s and Althusser’s insights about the broader cultural impacts of the state, alongside Rose’s detailed articulation of the specific characteristics valorized under neoliberalism, provide an important frame for understanding the context through which young people come to activism in Canada. That is, young people are not free, unfettered actors, coming to individual choices within the Canadian nation-state, but rather they are constrained in specific, identifiable ways by the high modern and neoliberal cultural sphere of the contemporary state. Further, such forces of neoliberalism are in many ways the antithesis of political engagement, premised as they are upon an ideology of individualized consumerism and meritocracy and the erosion of collective ties. This has specific implications for the modes and means by which young people both come to activism, and engage in its practices. As shall be argued with the support of data in the chapters to follow, the specific manner in which the cultural sphere of the Canadian state combines with neoliberal governmentality to undermine activist practices is by (a) effectively limiting the imagined possibilities of activist engagement through the construction of the ‘good and legitimate citizen’ and (b) curtailing the means by which activism is carried out, so that it becomes limited to the individualized acts of consumption by apparently choosing subjects.
2.2 Framing the cultural ordinary: Bourdieu and youth theorists

While the aforementioned concepts can help to reveal the political and social milieux in which young activists enact their political resistance and response, it is the work of Pierre Bourdieu and youth theorists that can further illuminate how forms of neoliberal subjectivity are lived out (and contested) within their every day lives. This theoretical work can also illuminate the manner in which class and ‘race’ concerns have come to reside within youth activist subcultures, even though these concerns are systematically misrecognized from within the subcultures themselves. Bourdieu’s complex cultural sociological framework, which includes such inter-related concepts as habitus, doxa, field, cultural capital, and authorized language, has been most helpful to me in trying to make sense of the every day impacts of the wider cultural sphere on youth activist subcultures. In addition, I have drawn upon related terms such as Raymond Williams’ structures of feeling, Julie Bettie’s class performances, and Sarah Thornton’s subcultural capital, within the context of the wider youth subcultural literature. I shall outline the contributions of each of these to my theoretical frame below.

2.2.1 Habitus, field, and structures of feeling

The notions of habitus and field stand in many ways at the centre of Bourdieu’s impressive theoretical oeuvre, which he developed over decades of empirical work examining social structures that spanned the peasant cultures of Algeria to the elite universities of France. In describing habitus, Bourdieu writes,

The agent engaged in practice knows the world but with a knowledge which…is not set up in the relation of externality of a knowing consciousness. He [or she] knows it, in a sense, too well, without objectifying distance, takes it for granted, precisely because he [or she] is caught up in it, bound up with it; he [or she] inhabits it like a garment (un habit) or a familiar habitat. He [or she] feels at home in the world because the world is also in him [or her], in the form of habitus, a
virtue made of necessity which implies a form of love of necessity, *amor fati.*” (1997, p. 142, emphasis in original).

The *habitus*, as conceived by Bourdieu, explains how an individual can feel that one’s decisions about and experiences within the world arise solely because of one’s own quirks and personality traits, while sociological research reveals that such decisions and experiences are often highly structured by factors including class location, ‘race’ and gender. Because the *habitus* is experienced within the *doxa* (or common sense assumptions) of a particular *field* (or regulated social space), it can become very difficult for an individual to see the ways in which one’s encounters with the world are, in fact, structured in part by social and cultural factors.

The *habitus* and the *field* are interrelated and inseparable concepts; as Wacquant (1992) states, “[the] key concepts of *habitus* and *field* designate bundles of relations” (p. 16, italics in original). Bourdieu developed the concept of *field* to more precisely locate what had previously been too broadly termed ‘society’:

For him, a differentiated society is not a seamless totality integrated by systemic functions, a common culture, criss-crossing conflicts, or an over-arching authority, but an ensemble of relatively autonomous spheres of ‘play’ that cannot be collapsed under an overall societal logic, be it that of capitalism, modernity, or postmodernity (Wacquant, 1992, p. 16-17).

Each *field* carries its own system of logic, often influenced by the wider sphere of social and cultural norms and pressures, but nonetheless retaining a certain autonomy and distinct set of regulative principles. As Wacquant notes, “these principles delimit a socially structured space in which agents struggle, depending on the position they occupy in that space, either to change or to preserve its boundaries and form” (1992, p. 17).

The *habitus*, in its interrelationship with the *field*, thus does not consist simply of a structured set of qualities or characteristics that are imposed from outside of the individual in any
straightforward manner. Although the *field* “presents itself as a structure of probabilities, of rewards, gains, profits, sanctions” (Wacquant, 1992, p. 18), it also “always implies a measure of indeterminacy” (ibid). The *habitus* thus interacts with the *field* in a manner that involves negotiation: “Habitus is creative, inventive, but within the limits of its structures, which are the embodied sedimentation of the social structures which produced it” (Wacquant, 1992, p. 19).

One way to understand the specific realm of youth activist subcultures, then, is to see them as a particular *field* of interaction, one with its own rules and norms, and its own associated *habitus*. The social and cultural factors which shape the *habitus* and *field* of youth activist subcultures, I shall argue, arise in part from state histories of colonialism, racism, and classism, as well as contemporary liberalism and neoliberalism. In bridging the individual with the socio-cultural, *habitus* can help illuminate how forms of governmentality -- such as neoliberal subjectivity -- become embodied by these young activists, and the ways in which this impacts upon and shapes their political and material responses to the state. It also lends insight into the reproduction of the activist *habitus* through specific class and ‘race’ histories of individual families previously exposed to the *doxa* of activism, and who likewise enculturated their children in this manner.

Another important linking concept between the individual and socio-cultural comes from Raymond Williams, a British cultural theorist and contemporary of Bourdieu’s who was highly influential for the work of the classic youth subcultural theorists of the Birmingham School. Perhaps Williams’ most famous concept is that of *structures of feeling*, a term he coined in his 1977 text *Marxism and Literature*. Williams describes the concept of ‘structures of feeling’ as follows:

*We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling*
against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a ‘structure’: as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies (1977, p. 132, emphasis in original).

‘Structures of feeling’ is similar to habitus in that it denotes the manner in which broader social and cultural forces come to be experienced bodily, as a personal process that can be difficult to link to the wider sphere. Although Williams did not develop this term and locate it within a wider cultural sociological theory, as did Bourdieu with habitus and field, I retain its use here for its focus on the emotionality of every day experiences, and the power this has over the every day.

2.2.2. Class performances, subcultural capital, and authorized language

In order to more carefully elucidate the particular forms of cultural expression that make up the habitus of youth activists, I draw upon Julie Bettie’s (2003) notion of class performance. Through this analytical category, Bettie permits the complexity of class – and class in its relation to ‘race’-- to become central, focusing on a ‘culture of class’ in ways that are broadly similar to that of the classic theorists of youth subcultures. She understands both class and ‘race’ to be categories that emerge from a specific history, as well as being classifications that can be enacted through performances that serve to either enhance or conceal one’s class location. Thus, while Bettie’s conception of ‘class performance’ makes class the primary mode of analysis, it also incorporates ‘race’ into its analytical remit, where she understands ‘race’ to be played out in complex relation to class cultures.  

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18 For example, Bettie (2003) describes how Mexican-American middle class girls would ‘become Mexican’ in the eyes of their peers through enacting working class performances that belied their middle class origins (cf p. 91ff).
Following Bettie, I will argue that youth activists have developed elaborate forms of ‘class performances’ to permit their belonging within youth activist subcultures. It is important to note that such a ‘performance’ ought not to be understood as a simple ‘choice.’ The ways in which performances are embodied and enacted are intricately connected to the particular youth subculture with which young people identify (or their field), and the habitus that they have developed. Noteworthy is that this concept of class performance means that one may enact a class culture that does not match one’s class origins. In the case of youth activist subcultures, I will describe a complex form of ‘working-class/middle class performance,’ that permit young people to feel that they ‘belong’ within youth activist cultures (and likewise, to identify who does not ‘belong’). This form, which I have termed ‘performing grunge,’ is marked by a set of attire and practices that are generally associated with poor or working class lives (for example, wearing only second-hand clothing, dumpster-diving, living in low-income housing), but in this case is performed by people who, by and large, carry the cultural capital of middle class histories and opportunities. The specifics of ‘performing grunge’ shall be elaborated upon in Chapter 6.

In drawing on the language of ‘subcultures’ to describe the youth activist groups with which this study is concerned, I am also able to make use of one other conceptual term that makes up this segment of my theoretical frame. Sarah Thornton (1996) has coined the phrase ‘subcultural capital’ to describe the status acquired by young ravers who are ‘in the know’ about the best parties within the 1990s underground dance scene in Britain. The term is linked, of course, to Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural capital,’ which refers to the acquisition of skills and knowledge, generally through education, that permits one to more successfully navigate economically and socially stratified societies. Thornton’s revision of the term locates it within the specific symbolic economy of the subcultural milieu, where the internal logic of the
particular subcultural *field* requires specific knowledge (such as the knowledge needed to ‘perform grunge’). I further link Thornton’s subcultural capital to Bourdieu’s concept of *authorized language*, which refers to the ways in which only certain people (in this case, those who are ‘in the know’) are authorized to render specific utterances meaningful. I mention these concepts here only in passing, to mark for the reader their recurrence in future chapters, where they will be elaborated upon and illustrated through data.

2.3 Youthful subjectivities and the foundations of relational agency[^19]

The underlying assumption about subjectivity that informs this framework is one that stands in opposition to a long tradition of humanist discourses of the self-conscious “I.” It is a theory of the subject that “is both determined and regulated by the forces of power inherent in a given social formation, but capable also of undermining them” (Easthope & McGowan, 2004, p. 73). It sees the subject as pre-conditioned, but not fixed; however, it does not take the subject (and the subject’s potential for resistance) to be completely fluid, as in some post-structural renderings (for example, see M. Rose, 2002). The potential for resistance arises from within this subjectivity, as it has been shaped by, for example, the *habitus* acquired through subcultural affiliations. It is within the interstices of these subcultural relationships that the potential for meaningful political resistance arises, a form of collaborative agency that stands in stark contrast to the neoliberal, individualizing subject of high modern societies.

In developing a concept of relational agency tied to modes of action in youth activist subcultures, I turn to a body of theory that lies largely within the domain of feminist political philosophy. While this literature does not speak to youth activism specifically, its relevance to

[^19]: As noted at the beginning of this chapter, much of this theoretical framework will be further developed throughout the thesis. This section, in particular, is substantially expanded at the beginning of Chapter 7.
the questions at hand come from the commitment expressed by feminists to better understand agency in order to enhance women’s capacity for resisting unjust social structures (Cornell, 1995; The London Feminist Salon Collective, 2004). Some of the key exchanges in the debate about agency can be found in the works of Benhabib (1999), Benhabib, Butler, Cornell and Fraser (1995), Lovell (2003), and McNay (2000, 2003a, 2004). The crux of the contention lies within three domains of the debate; the first is the nature of the self; the second is whether agency is merely reactive or can also be generative; and the third is whether agency can be best understood as residing within an individual or as belonging to a larger, collective and collaborative entity.

Amongst feminist political philosophers, there is general agreement that the “self” is not a completely coherent, self-aware and rational entity, as per Enlightenment doctrine. Rather, the fact of the self’s very lack of coherence is seen as the site of potential for creative choice and change. Whether agency is understood as arising through performative aspects of selfhood that subvert hegemonic norms (Butler, 1995a), or through the narrative construction of identity that can lead to action (Benhabib, 1999), theorists of agency tend to agree that it is within the non-unitary self that the potential for non-determined action arises (see also, Honig, 2001; McDonald, 1999; McNay, 2000, 2003a). Beyond this core agreement, there are a range of views on how agency can be best understood without being reduced to either an overtly deterministic or simple voluntaristic approach. Lois McNay (2000) has developed a theory of agency that, she claims, can explain the ways in which it can arise as a political, generative response, rather than merely as a reactive capacity. She developed this elaboration in response to the limits she saw within the agency debates as posed by Butler and Benhabib. Terry Lovell (2003), in turn, has developed a further elaboration of the original feminist debate that incorporates a conceptualization of agency
as residing within collectives, or groups, as one way to describe the phenomenon of “solidarity.”

In a later publication, McNay (2004) continues to develop her theoretical articulations of agency, suggesting that it needs to be understood through a “relational analysis of experience” (p. 180). In my own theoretical work, I shall build upon this latter work of McNay’s and that of Lovell’s, considering both in relation to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, in order to best explain the data I gathered relating to youth activists’ experience of coming to action within the public sphere.

Terry Lovell draws upon the theories of Bourdieu and Butler to describe how agency can be understood as a relational entity. She begins by identifying the trouble with locating ‘the self’ at the centre of agency: “it is often difficult to avoid slippage, so that the ‘self’ merges with ‘the individual human agent’ when the analysis moves from abstract theory to examples of specific instances in the social history of transformative moments and movements” (Lovell, 2003, p 2). Rather than focusing on the individual agent in trying to understand how social transformation can take place, Lovell suggests the following:

> What is required is the recognition of agency as a function of *ensemble* performances – often with a very large cast of others. Transformative political agency lies in the interstices of interaction, in collective social movements in formation in specific circumstances, rather than in the fissures of a never-fully-constituted self, or in the always open-ended character of speech and language, although these instabilities of language and the self are indeed among the conditions of possibility of agency (2003, p 2).

Thus, Lovell is describing a conception of agency that incorporates a more complex account of the role of relationships and interactions, with a specific focus on the realm of action in the public sphere. Such an account can help explain the ways in which youth activists come to action, even in the face of neoliberal pressures towards individualism and cultural pressures to be a ‘good citizen’ who engages in acts of charity but does not challenge the state. Lovell situates her work from within Bourdieu’s framework and, indeed, I see Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* as
highly complementary to this approach, as it is within the interstices of relationships that young people develop the *habitus* to engage in oppositional practices. By understanding such relationships as one source of resistant action, Lovell’s concept of relational agency can nuance the sense that *habitus* might render youth activist subcultures as overly determined by their location as such. In seeing these relationships as a source of both constraint and action, we can begin to appreciate the complexities of these social forces.

Lovell points to this complexity as she discusses the ways in which her conception of agency, as residing within the collective, overcomes some of the limitations to other accounts of agency. She points to psychoanalytic theory, which sees “the subject [as] never entirely at one with the social persona she has acquired and that she assumes in the everyday practices in which this unfolds and develops over time” (2003, p 13). This stands in contrast to Benhabib’s narrative account, which seems to imply that the subject may be able to come to some sense of peace and cohesion through the process of narrating her story to herself and to those around her. An aspect of this infinite incompleteness of the self arises with respect to resistance. Lovell writes: “Pure acts of resistance are as rare as unequivocal acts of submission. We may look for and find elements of submission/consent to norms within the most courageous acts of resistance, and vice versa, elements of resistance in the *habitus* of submission” (2003, p 12). This is an important insight to explain why acts of collective agency might be of greater significance than any individual act:

What both ‘performativity’ and ‘*habitus*’ permit is the recognition that individual agency is not necessarily aligned with resistance and that neither ‘dispositions to resist,’ nor performative acts of resistance, guarantee political effectiveness. Effective political agency is interactional and collective (Lovell, 2003, p 14, emphasis mine).
Thus Lovell provides a conception of agency that moves beyond a focus on the individual, and showcases instead the ways in which collectivities influence and support the possibility for action within the public sphere.

Lovell’s account of agency is of particular relevance to my study because of its focus on the modality of agency which can only be enacted through political acts of relationality, and their place within attempts to create positive social change. Such an account permits some insight into how youth activist subcultures can provide the relational resources by which its members can act to subvert dominant political ideologies, even in the face of their incorporation of certain class values that lead to particular forms of exclusion. When taken alongside Bourdieu’s and Bettie’s accounts of the reproductive elements of class cultures, which can create specific forms of class and ‘race’ sedimentation (McNay, 2000) within youth activist subcultures, Lovell’s relational approach helps to locate agency at the level of the group, such that the democratic potential of such subcultures are not overlooked. As such, it offers another layer of insight into the complex subject-formation of young activists within the contemporary Canadian nation-state, and their potential for action within that context.

2.4 Summary: interdisciplinary frameworks for understanding youth activist subcultures

Young people do not come to activist practices in a bubble, landing there untouched by previous histories and the effects of powerful social and cultural influences. In order to better understand how young people come to engage in oppositional strategies designed to challenge the legitimacy of certain state claims, I have developed an interdisciplinary theoretical framework intended to account for these diverse influences and factors. The central aspects of this framework include: a theoretical account of the regulatory cultural role played by the state, including the powerful forces of governmentality as they are enacted through the construction of
the ‘good citizen’; a cultural sociological approach to youth subcultures, which incorporates the role of *habitus*, *field*, class performances, and their related processes of regulation; and finally, a feminist philosophical approach to questions of agency and action within the political realm.

In the chapters that follow, I shall draw upon the results of a year of ethnographic research with youth activist communities across the three largest cities in Canada (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver), in order to support and illustrate the arguments I have made in these first two chapters. After a detailed discussion of my methodology in chapter 3, chapter 4 will begin with an account of schooling for citizenship in Canada, in order to reveal the historical and contemporary shape of the national ideal of the ‘good (youth) citizen.’ Chapter 5 will begin to draw upon ethnographic data in order to document the ways in which the current and historical cultural context of ‘good citizenship’ has impacted young activists, and their wider relations with the cultural sphere of the Canadian state. Chapters 6 and 7 further draw upon ethnographic data in order to demonstrate the formation of youth activist subcultures and the cultural resources used to both delimit membership as well as to develop forms of relational agency that permit action within the Canadian neoliberal political realm. The final chapter will offer reflections on the implications of this research for questions of schooling, youth subject-formation, and social change in an era of globalization.
I am waiting for Matthew in the swanky lobby of an upscale hotel in Vancouver, where he is staying with his partner for a big international conference. Both of them have been participants in my research, and I wonder how they feel, punky young queer couple, here because of the political and advocacy work that they do with street-involved youth in the city. I certainly don’t feel as if I fit in; all the people around me appear to be 55 or older, mostly white, with the exception of a group of Asian folks, still over 50 and dressed in business suits. The tattoo on my arm is showing, and I imagine that I can feel the uneasy glances of these older, suited people.

- field notes, May 3rd, 2006

What happens if we understand the raw materials of everyday lived cultures as if they were living art forms?

- Paul Willis, The Ethnographic Imagination, p. ix.

As with any scholarly research project, I have been forced to grapple with the following fundamental question: how can I legitimately make the claims to knowledge that I do on the basis of the data I have collected? This research project is framed by some core assumptions about the production of knowledge, and the ways in which young people’s experiences can be accessed and represented through the medium of the written word. In this chapter, I trace the epistemologies that undergird and shape the methods I have employed in order to answer my research questions.

Drawing primarily upon phenomenology and hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1998(1981)), I have employed what I will call a ‘cultural ethnography,’ consistent with revealing the ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams, 1977) of the ‘cultural every day’ (Williams, 1989), as well as uncovering the “ordinary suffering” (la petite misère) (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 4) of the every day lives of the young people with whom I worked. Associated with a hermeneutic approach, as outlined by Paul Ricoeur, my study incorporates an element of history, as one manner in which to create some context for the contemporary social and cultural worlds of youth activism – or, following Ricoeur (1998(1981)), to provide a ‘detour’ through history that reveals aspects of the present. I
extend the idea of the historical detour to also incorporate some aspects of the wider social and cultural present, through the means of a discourse analysis of contemporary citizenship curriculum (Fairclough, 1999, 2005; Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001).

This interdisciplinary methodology creates specific conceptual, ethical, and representational issues. To address this array of issues, the chapter shall proceed as follows: first, I discuss what I mean by ‘cultural ethnography,’ within the context of the cultural and subcultural studies that I have drawn upon; second, I will discuss the textual artifacts analyzed through discourse analysis, and the select aspects of Canadian history I have used to create the ‘detour’ that provides some context and backdrop for the cultural ethnography; third, I will consider some of the key issues associated with a phenomenological and hermeneutic approach, such as reflexivity, the responsibility of the researcher to the social world, and the question of written representation and its vicissitudes; and finally, I will outline in detail the process through which I found my participants, and describe the specific methods used.

3.1 Cultural ethnography: imagining the social and cultural world

The primary methodological approach that I have used to gain insight into my research questions is one that I have termed ‘cultural ethnography.’20 Following on a long tradition of sociological inquiry, cultural ethnography is inherently phenomenological, extending Harold Garfinkel’s earlier ‘ethnomethodology’ which was concerned with the “sense-making practices in which people are involved – the way in which meaning is attributed to the social world” (Beart, 1998, p. 82). Phenomenology is similarly concerned with how people come to understand

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20 I recognize that pairing ‘cultural’ with ‘ethnography’ might appear to be somewhat of a tautology. What is an ethnography if not cultural? I add this descriptor to my use of the term ‘ethnography’ to signal that I am using the term within the context of cultural studies, and also to note the links between it and the phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy that informs it (as described further in this chapter below).
their own social and cultural worlds – or, how they develop and account for their common-sense knowledge about the world (Dillabough, Wang, and Kennelly, 2005). As Ricoeur states, “the most fundamental phenomenological presupposition of a philosophy of interpretation is that every question concerning any sort of ‘being’ [étant] is a question about the meaning of that ‘being’” (1998 (1981), p. 114). It is these forms of knowledge that a cultural ethnography is designed to capture.

Willis (2000) situates ethnography as the methodological approach that can encounter and record the wide range of such ‘sense-making practices’ in a tradition that draws strongly upon a concern with the ‘cultural everyday,’ as advocated by Raymond Williams (1989). Such an approach is also indebted to hermeneutic insights about the interpretive nature of the social world, and the ways in which individuals try to articulate, express, and comprehend their experiences and that of those around them. As Paul Ricoeur explains in his book on hermeneutics and the research process, “each society has created its own medium of understanding by creating the social and cultural worlds in which it understands itself” (Ricoeur, 1998 (1981)). This means that the process of inquiry through which I come to my interpretations of my research participants’ lives is forever mediated by our shared existence within society and culture, which both provides insight into and generates confusion about the meanings contained therein. In other words, an ‘ethnographic imagination,’ as called for by Willis, is necessary to interpret the meanings and life worlds of those with whom I research. He writes:

Of fundamental importance to the ethnographic imagination is comprehending creativities of the everyday as indissolubly connected to, dialectically and intrinsically, wider social structures, structural relations and structurally provided conditions of existence (2000, p 34)
The ‘cultural’ is therefore not seen as separate from the ‘structural’, but neither is it understood as standing in a straightforward relationship with it; rather, it is a location through which the structural can be glimpsed, as can the modes of refusal, resistance, or co-optation taken up by people living within that cultural milieu.

A cultural ethnography, while deeply engaged in what participants have to say about their lives, also opens up the space for understanding cultural expression as taking place both with and beyond language. As Ricoeur (1998 (1981)) states, “[I]t is no longer possible to grasp the mental life of others in its immediate expressions; rather it is necessary to reproduce it, to reconstruct it, by interpreting objectified signs” (p. 51). Such ‘objectified signs’ include the social text created through the interviews and focus groups, as well as the observations generated by my participation in the activist life worlds of the research participants. As Paul Willis writes,

> It is not saying that the sensuous and expressive practices of culture function like a language, leaving language queen. It is saying that language is part of a continuum of types of human meaning-making, and therefore that meaning is not contained by language (2000, p 12, italics in original).

In other words, a cultural ethnography, while engaging in many of the ethnographic practices common to other methodological approaches (e.g. interviews), is also concerned with pushing beyond the constraints of language in order to understand and explicate the symbolic expression of individuals embedded within their cultural milieu. Such symbols might include material aspects, such as clothing or other forms of personal decoration, or they might be derived from specific methodological techniques, such as visual ethnography (as described below).
3.2 The hermeneutic detour: history and discourse analysis

Noted philosopher of phenomenology and hermeneutics Paul Ricoeur states that “[Wo/]Man learns about [her or] himself only through his [or her] acts, through the exteriorisation of his [or her] life and through the effects it produces on others. He [or she] comes to know [her or] himself only by the detour of understanding, which is, as always, an interpretation” (1998 (1981), p. 52). Ricoeur describes one mode by which such a “detour” can take place as happening through historical interpretation: “Universal history…becomes the field of hermeneutics. To understand myself is to make the greatest detour, via the memory which retains what has become meaningful for all mankind” (1998 (1981), p. 52). In a later book, entitled Memory, History and Forgetting, he elaborates on the complex elements of history, including a reflection on the role that ‘forced memory’ plays within history: “when memory (via narrative, but also via commemoration) is forced, it comes armed with an ‘authorized’ history which is the official history taught and learnt in institutions” (Hannoum, 2005, p. 127). Taken together, these reflections inspire a critical assessment of what kinds of history make it through the powerful cultural and political filters that inform our understanding of the contemporary moment. In other words, a detour through history is not a straight-forward endeavour, because of the powerful role that politics plays in representing history. Thus an historical ‘detour’ attempts to call into question dominant representations of our cultural, political and social past, and is a necessary component of a hermeneutic analysis concerned with contextualizing the cultural, political, and social present.

Such an analysis will necessarily be limited, confined by space and time constraints that permit only certain aspects to be raised; in particular, for the sake of this research project – which is not a history project – I have chosen specific elements of Canadian history in order to
contextualize and nuance the ethnographic research I have undertaken. Because my focus is on the relation of one group of young people (i.e. youth activists) to the Canadian nation-state, I have chosen to focus on one location through which the investments of the Canadian state in shaping the political subjectivities of its young citizens can be seen: namely, citizenship education. This emerges as a partial response to Pierre Bourdieu’s commitment, as expressed by Loïc Wacquant, to “[question] …customary ways of thinking and acting politically through the radical historicization of everything having to do with democracy: its vocabulary, its official discourse and ordinary representations, its distinctive devices and associations” (Wacquant, 2005a, p. 2). Understanding citizenship education as one of the prime locations within the curriculum where young people are overtly taught how they are expected to relate to the state, I have chosen this site of representation as one lens through which to gain insight into the priorities of the Canadian state. I seek this ‘detour’ through the shifting histories of education for citizenship, and consider how these have influenced the ‘cultural sphere’ through which young activists come to their practices as such.

I have also extended the idea of the detour-through-history to incorporate one other means by which to better contextualize the social and cultural present. While the history of citizenship education has allowed me to better situate the current context within which youth activists act, I felt the need to expand this analysis into the present. I did so by completing a discourse analysis of civics curriculum documents from the three provinces in which my participants lived: BC, Ontario, and Quebec. While this makes up only a small component of the larger analysis of data derived from the ethnography, I see it as providing greater insight into the particular social and cultural pressures faced by young people today as they attempt to navigate their own relationship with citizenship and the state.
My brief discourse analysis, although technically not a ‘critical discourse analysis’ (or CDA) as described by Fairclough (2001), has been highly influenced by Fairclough’s approach to understanding discourse and its role in social formations. Influenced by many of the theorists who make up my conceptual framework (including Althusser and Bourdieu), Fairclough’s methodology highlights the role played by semiotic representations within the cultural sphere. He notes:

As everyday lives become more pervasively textually mediated, people’s lives are increasingly shaped by representations which are produced elsewhere. Representations of the world they live in, the activities they are involved in, their relationships with each other, and even who they are and how they (should) see themselves. The politics of representation becomes increasingly important – whose representations are these, who gains what from them, what social relations do they draw people into, what are their ideological effects, and what alternative representations are there? (1999, p. 75).

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) note the inherent interdisciplinarity of CDA, which combines “diverse disciplinary perspectives in its own analyses, and [is] used to complement more standard forms of social and cultural analysis” (1997, p. 271). Fairclough’s (2001) description of the methods used in CDA suggest that it is a more extensive set of practices than those I have carried out in my much more modest discourse analysis of curriculum documents. Nonetheless, my approach shares with his the steps of “focus[ing] upon a social problem that has a semiotic aspect,” “identifying obstacles to it being tackled” and “consider[ing] whether the social order … ‘needs’ the problem” (2001, p. 236). In the case of this study, I have drawn upon discourse analysis as an enhancing and supporting element in my methodological frame, rather than using it as the central thrust of my research. The power of CDA, and of discourse analysis more generally, lie in their capacity to uncover some of the hidden ideologies submerged within key
texts (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 1993); it is for this reason that I will make use of it to analyze the discourses of contemporary citizenship education curriculum.

3.3 The hermeneutic imperative: on reflexivity, responsibility, and writing

3.3.1 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is central to a hermeneutic and phenomenological approach. It is also consistent with the critical, feminist, and postcolonial methodological approaches that have influenced my work (Britzman, 1995; Lather, 2001; Smith, 1999). I understand reflexivity as both an intentional practice designed to respond to the concerns of critical, feminist and postcolonial scholars about the importance of revealing one’s own position in the always-ethically-troubling process of social research, and also as an integral component of the methodological process that I am employing. In An invitation to reflexive sociology, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) describe the role of reflexivity to be much more than a simple ‘placing’ of the researcher within social relations. Rather they posit reflexivity as something that must move beyond social relations toward an understanding of how the researcher’s position, as researcher, influences the interpretation of the data. deSales Turner (2003) further points out that a hermeneutic methodology requires one to present information to a reader regarding one’s own understanding of the social phenomena at hand such that the reader can assess the truth content for him or herself. Ricoeur also emphasized that we can never have a view from nowhere; our situated selves are not only physically located, but also “socially, culturally and politically situated and contingent” (Langdridge, 2004, p. 252). Willis writes,

I have long argued for a form of reflexivity, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a sense of the investigator’s history, subjectivity and theoretical positioning as a vital resource for the understanding of, and respect for, those under study (2000, p. 113).
Consequently, I began the chapter with the vignette from my field notes to highlight the ways in which my situated self was constantly a part of the research process. As that excerpt reveals, my own embodiment played an integral role in the research, whether it was because of my appearance (and what this meant for how others responded to me), or my emotions (and how this impacted on my capacity to carry out elements of the research). Both of these elements were inseparable from the research process; as a result, each find their way into the data analysis, where it seems relevant to the discussion at hand.

The balance, as articulated by Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong (2003), is always between the need for a critical assessment and explication of the relationship between those asking the questions and those who are answering them, and the problem of what Patricia Clough has called a “compulsive extroversion of interiority” (as cited in Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong, 2003, p 170). That is, reflexivity must walk a fine line between positioning oneself within the research, and making the entire project about the researcher. With this in mind, I have worked to articulate my presence within the research only when it seems relevant, drawing upon my emotional responses and embodied presence when it seems particularly relevant to the arguments that I am making.

One of the most important – and most difficult – locations through which I approached this research was as a member of some of the youth activist communities from which I drew participants. Responding in part to Bennett’s (2002) call for a more critical evaluation of the use of ‘insider knowledge’ as a methodological tool in youth research, I am suggesting that it was my role as both an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’ within this research process that allowed me to (at least partially) encounter and experience the ‘cultural every day’ of youth activist communities.
As a long-time volunteer with and current board member of a well-known youth-driven social justice organization in Vancouver, I approached my research from the tenuous position of being both ‘inside’ of the youth activist communities that I was researching, and, as a slightly older person, doctoral student, and researcher, as a necessary ‘outsider’ to these communities. This position powerfully structured the access that I was able to negotiate with youth activists, some of whom would otherwise have been undoubtedly hesitant to engage in a research project. Indeed, the greatest success that I found in recruiting participants was through my contacts; almost every attempt that I made to access youth activists through impersonal modes (such as list serves or posterings) drew no response. This was not particularly surprising; as a research project on what Paul Willis calls “social connection” (2000, p. xvi), having a personal connection with research participants became a necessary means through which to gain some partial access to their deeper social and cultural worlds. Also not surprising was that it was with the people with whom I had a prior connection that I was generally able to go the farthest; these were the people most likely to invite me to their activist events, who were the most open and forthcoming in their interviews, and who were most helpful in connecting me with other potential participants. Such generosity, built on the trust established through our prior collaborations, became a sensitive sticking point for me as I began to analyze the data and develop my theoretical arguments. Specifically, the ethical dilemma became how to accurately represent the incredible energy, commitment, and integrity of these individuals, while simultaneously critiquing the forms of practice that I argue limit the participation of young people in activist subcultures along class and ‘race’ lines. Similarly to Julie Bettie (2003), who notes the likelihood that her middle class participants felt “betrayed” because of her “emotional allegiance …to working class girls” (p
my own work may be seen by some of my middle class participants as unfairly critical of
them and their lives.

Beyond giving me access to research participants, my prior and ongoing engagement in
youth activist communities as an activist posed specific opportunities and dilemmas throughout
the research process. Because of the relationships that I developed through meeting activists
from across the country, and because of our shared interests in political and social change, I
became involved in several new activist projects, and was invited to speak at public forums about
my research and my own community work. The issue that this raised for me was where to draw
the line between being a ‘researcher’ and being simply there as the person that I am, as someone
who is involved with activist, Lefty and queer circles21 across all three cities where I carried out
this research. I would often end up at events where some of my research participants were also,
because of our mutual interests and involvement. It would become tempting at that point to pull
out my notebook and begin making ethnographic observations, particularly when situations
played out that were directly related to my research interests. However, I ultimately chose to
limit my ethnographic note-taking only to the events where I had been specifically invited by a
participant as a researcher, in this way trying to respect both my own need for rest from the
research, as well as the privacy of my research participants. Nonetheless, my participation in
such events, throughout and prior to the research project, cannot help but become the backdrop
of my comprehension of youth activist communities. Is it ever possible to actually “turn off” the
inner researcher? While any fieldnotes cited throughout this thesis come from situations in which
I was explicitly there as a researcher, nonetheless my sense of the community, what might be

21 Many of the participants in this project identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and/or queer. I thus
often encountered them in queer spaces, where I happened to be socially with friends and/or my girlfriend. Such
queer spaces were often also activist in nature, as there continues to be a great deal of crossover between activist
work and queer organizing, particularly in the lesbian and trans communities.
called my aesthetic intuition about activist subcultures, is also inevitably drawn from this larger context of experiences.

Given this, I see my position as both an insider and an outsider (inasmuch as I could be either of these things at any one time) to this research process as being an integral aspect of my methodology and highly consistent with the cultural ethnographic approach that I described above. How better to get inside the skin of a subculture than to be involved in it already? This of course poses specific and important challenges: one such being my inner battle, as outlined above, with a sense of betrayal of the remarkable people who participated in this project. The other, difficult in different ways, was to achieve the analytical distance necessary to even come to such a critique in the first place. The people reflected within this thesis are my people, or closely resemble the people with whom I have come to my own sense of identity. Nonetheless, I recognize within them some of the same struggles for recognition that I also have engaged with in my activist life world. Coming myself from a single-parent family and a working-class/working-poor background, I am intensely empathetic with the participant who explained to me:

I just always feel like I have this other identity, like I don’t really have the same sort of sense, because my family is so, in some ways, not traditional that … you kind of feel like you have a secret identity. And it’s weird because people kind of expect like because you’re so, like, people are like “you’re so well-adjusted” that they just expect this kind of thing (Karen)

My struggle, then, was to separate myself from my own desire to belong within the activist circles so similar to the ones in which I came to adulthood, and begin to recognize the patterns of classed and raced behaviour that characterize these communities. I had to put aside my admiration and (I must also admit) my envy, and try to attain enough analytical distance to assess
the ways in which these dynamics were playing out. This was never easy, and I likely achieved it in only partial ways.

3.3.2 Responsibility

One of the most difficult questions that has plagued me throughout this research process has been that of ‘why?’ Why am I doing this research? Who will it benefit? Who will it harm? This was not only an internal question; I occasionally received such challenges from others, especially from those involved in activist circles. One colleague questioned whether my work might be used by the state to assist them in their repression of activism. I had a lengthy e-mail exchange with a participant who questioned whether a research project on activism was necessary, or whether instead academics ought to be focusing on the problems created by social inequalities within the state (I considered it a minor affirmation of my reasoning when he ultimately agreed to do an interview with me, after I offered a detailed e-mail explanation of my rationale). At an activist meeting, I overheard another academic who has also done research on activism in the past say that she was switching her research focus towards policing, because activists did not need to be studied any more.

My response to this line of questioning, both internal and external, is two-fold. First of all, as discussed in the opening chapter, while this study is certainly about youth activist subcultures, the larger framing context is the Canadian nation-state, and the effects of the idealized ‘good citizen’ and its relation to Canada’s histories of colonialism, classism, racism, liberalism and neoliberalism on the space that young people might occupy in their efforts at democratic participation. Thus, this project is at least as much about the cultural sphere of the Canadian state, and its modes of representing and reinforcing the idea of the ‘good citizen,’ as it
is about activism. Secondly, following Paul Willis, I hope that this project will contribute to “the responsible provision of possible materials towards the reflexivity of social agents themselves” (2000, p. 149). That is, through documenting the aspects of class- and ‘race’-based harms still occurring within youth activist subcultures, I hope to provide some small catalyst for reflexivity and change within these subcultures. Loïc Wacquant (2004) notes that critical thought may be the only means by which to dissolve doxa; I hope that this critical intervention will permit the dissolution of some of the problematic elements of the doxa of youth activist subcultures, or at least provide some tools for reflexivity for the participants who read this thesis. At the least, it has provided me with some of the requisite analytical tools to bring to my own activist practices; this is having an influence within my own small sphere of community work, as I engage in ongoing conversations about how to lessen the class- and ‘race’-based exclusions within the groups with which I work.

In order to facilitate the latter process, I have attempted to make both myself and my research as accessible as possible throughout and after the research period. In addition to being as transparent as I was able to be about my developing analysis within interviews, I also made a point of inviting participants to an early academic presentation of this research in Toronto; in Vancouver, I organized a special session for community youth activist organizations, to which I also invited participants. I was also invited by one of the community organizations with which I am involved to present my research findings, in an accessible format, as part of a ‘training program’ for young people interested in becoming involved in social justice and/or activist work. Once I had completed the first draft of the dissertation, I sent it to all participants who were interested and encouraged them to provide me with their thoughts or feedback. In addition, I will invite all participants to my final thesis defense. Ensuring that my research will be read and/or
heard by the participants themselves and by other youth activists is one effective way of ensuring my own reflexivity, in that it forces me to be certain that my claims are accurate and defensible, beyond the requirements given those qualities by academic discipline. In many ways, I think this kind of participant feedback might be a more rigorous peer review process than that instituted within academia itself; if my research does not in some way resonate with the people about whom it is written, then I have done something wrong indeed. This is not to say that individual participants will have the final say over the product I create; the work is mine, and necessarily is filtered through my specific set of experiences, perspectives, and interests. However, an effective ethnography ought to, at the least, make sense to the people who are living it. As Paul Willis notes,

No ethnographer should ever say, ‘This is how it is,’ or ‘I know better than you do about your life.’ The point at issue is whether understanding and human empathy are increased or not (2000, p. 120).

3.3.3 Writing

Finally, the last issue I will address here, true for any research project but perhaps more apparent for a project informed by hermeneutics and phenomenology, is the question of ‘writing up’ the results, and how to do this in a way that even comes close to resembling the social and cultural worlds that were the subject of this study. As Ricoeur notes, “to interpret is to render near what is far…The text is, par excellence, the basis for communication in and through distance” (1998 (1981), p 111). Thus the hermeneutic process is inevitably concerned with textual representation, whether that ‘text’ be written or spoken. The act of interpretation always requires the application of words to a situation outside of oneself – through distanciation, as described by Ricoeur (1998 (1981)). That textual representation is necessary to the hermeneutic
and phenomenological project does not clarify the best means by which to create such representations, however. As Paul Willis writes,

Especially when it is trying to be scientific, linguistic communication usually flattens rather than evokes phenomena, so artifice to the limits of language is sometimes necessary. Written art is needed to re-create living art. Art reproducing art! ... This can be the only means of presenting the ‘rough ground’ on which agents live and move, showing the complexity of lived relations and forms for which words and theories do not yet exist, but which somehow, in practice, and in the practical relations of the field, connect up some of the important elements that interest the researcher (2000, p. 118).

While I am certain that my attempts at representation within these pages will not be even roughly comparable to art, I am compelled by Willis’ encouragement to make use of the creative edges of language in order to best represent the complex cultural worlds of the young people who I encountered in this research. In particular, his injunction helps to highlight the ways in which language can be used to foreclose possibilities, ‘flatten[ing] rather than evok[ing] phenomena.’ Specifically, I am concerned that by committing my analysis to the written page it acquires a problematic authority and rigidity -- particularly once it is deemed acceptable for a doctoral examination -- that does not do justice to the multiple meanings that have eluded these pages. Without a great deal of provisos and apologies, which can quickly become distracting, it is easy for a piece of writing to stand in as a completed work, as if it has been able to capture all of the complexities, messiness, and uncertainty that make up social and cultural reality. While the possibility for creative expression and multi-lingual articulation provided by ethnography helps forestall this somewhat, I am aware that even my own theories look weightier to me once they are on the page. What I want to note here, then, is the fact that this written document, with its associated theories and the tiny percentage of ethnographic data that I was able to incorporate out of thousands of pages of transcripts, field notes, and visual representations, is necessarily partial,
incomplete, and open to reinterpretation. I do not write this in the spirit of unlimited and infinite forms of indeterminacy – I believe that there are social, material and cultural realities, which can be more or less captured, as a system of meaning, through research and careful representation. But a text such as this one will never include everything, nor should that be the task to which it aspires.

3.4 The details: methods and participants

Having outlined the epistemological approach informing my methodology, I turn now to a detailed description of the actual methods employed. Each participant’s involvement in the research project began with a semi-structured interview (see appendix 1 for interview protocol). While some of the interviews proceeded more or less as documented within the protocol and lasted about two hours, others ranged back and forth across topics, incorporating sidetracks and non-sequiters, and lasted up to four hours. This had everything to do with the style of the interviewee, as I endeavored to follow their lead and allow the interview to take the shape with which they were most comfortable. I often found that the interviews created a sense of intimacy, particularly noticeable when I was interviewing someone with whom I had no prior history. This intimacy was both welcome and troubling, as I recognized it to be one-sided – I interpreted the intimacy as being created because of the personal details they had just shared with me, but of course I had shared very little of myself in return. I was happy to share pieces of my own story when the opportunity arose, or when I was asked – indeed, I felt an ethical obligation to do so, due to this intimacy I had uneasily noticed developing -- but often the interviews ended without a two-way exchange. Many participants remarked that they enjoyed the interview, appreciating the opportunity to speak at length about themselves and to work through some of their thoughts on
activism, citizenship, and democracy. Participants also consistently apologized for talking too much, reflective perhaps of the (Canadian?) taboo associated with ‘dominating’ a conversation, particularly with strangers.

At the end of the interview, I would inform them of the other two stages of the research and invite their participation in each, as they saw fit. The second stage was a shadowing process, whereby I would attend anything that they felt related to their activist practice, and to which they felt comfortable inviting me. The result was that I attended an array of events and activities, including, but not limited to: an arts-based urban youth project, a university class, a play, a conference, various protests, a fundraising cabaret, various public forums, and multiple activist planning meetings. This shadowing process was the means whereby I gathered ethnographic observations, standing in for the fact that there is no central gathering place through which I could observe youth activist cultures (such as the standard gathering places of youth used by other ethnographers, like schools (e.g. Bettie, 2003; Willis, 1977) or music clubs (e.g. Thornton, 1996)).

The third stage of the data collection was a focus group, held in each city near the end of my research time there. During the two hour focus group I engaged participants in an arts-based process (Harper, 1998), with enough time for two of the three possible activities that I had planned (see appendix 2 for detailed descriptions of the activities). This was one of the means through which the visual and the symbolic were engaged, as a way to both trigger further dialogue, as well as to access submerged representations, images and ideas that were not readily accessible through the interview or participant-observation format. While ultimately the images created were not as productive as I had anticipated for my data analysis (mostly because they were done in a rush and the key elements of each were more provocatively documented within
the focus group transcripts), nonetheless this was an integral aspect of the focus group process, concomitant with cultural ethnographic aims. To give readers a glimpse of the kinds of symbolic representations that were created, I include here two examples of ‘the perfect activist,’ created by the Montreal and Vancouver focus groups:

Illustration 3: The Perfect Activist (focus group activity)

As noted in the activities documented within the appendix, these images represent both the pressures felt by young activists from each other, as well as broader media representations, circulating rhetoric within popular culture, and the ideals that participants themselves hold central to activism. The creation of these images provoked laughter, commiseration, disagreement, and in-depth conversations. In this manner, the visual and symbolic, while ultimately not becoming a data source, functioned as a fruitful creative prompt through which participants could access and express some of the stickier aspects of their complex location as ‘activists’ (see also Gallagher, 2007, for a related methodological approach using drama).
3.4.1 The participants

The number of participants at each research site was partially determined by my own physical proximity to each city. Whereas the Vancouver and Toronto research was carried out while I lived in each city, I traveled to and from Montreal while living in Toronto in order to interview activists there. This necessarily limited the number of people I could reasonably interview, and also curbed my capacity to shadow Montreal participants to the same extent as I could with those living in Vancouver and Toronto. I spent six months in Vancouver and six months in Toronto; while in Toronto, I made four trips to Montreal, visits which varied in length from one night to one week. Within the Vancouver site, I carried out interviews with 16 participants between the ages of 17 and 29; in Toronto, I interviewed 12 participants between the ages of 13 and 29; and in Montreal, I interviewed 10 participants between the ages of 20 and 27. I had the opportunity to shadow almost all of the participants for at least one activist event; some participants I spent more time with than others, depending on their availability and interest. There were also additional participants in two of the three focus groups; in Vancouver, two additional people who did not take part in the rest of the project participated in the focus group, and in Toronto, one additional person participated. Thus, the total number of young people who participated across all aspects of the project in the three cities totaled 41; the average age of all participants was 23. Of all the participants interviewed, 22 were female, and 16 were male (including one transgendered man).

As noted in the preceding chapters, I focused on young people involved in forms of activism which I viewed as directly contesting the state. In my mind, this encompassed anti-globalization, anti-poverty, anti-colonialism, and anti-war activism -- four inter-locking webs of engagement which, in my experience, drew many of the same people to their organizing
meetings. As noted above, I generally found participants through my own contacts and through
word-of-mouth. Beginning in Vancouver, I set up interviews with a few people I had
 collaborated with on other projects, and they referred me to other people, who then referred me
to others, and so on (also known as snowballing). Once I moved to Toronto, I drew on contacts I
still had there from when I had lived in that city five years before. I also called upon my
Vancouver participants to connect me with anyone they might know, finding that many of the
activist networks stretched across the country.\(^22\) In all three cities, I contacted local activist and
social justice organizations who sent out my call through their list serves. This was rarely
directly successful, although it did function to get my name and project out into the activist ether,
so that when I was directly referred to someone by another participant, they might have
previously heard about the project thus seeming to increase my legitimacy as someone who was
‘in the know.’

One advantage of this ‘snowballing’ approach is the way in which it helped to ensure that
participants were at least loosely associated with each other, strengthening the sense of an
activist ‘subculture.’ However, as documented within the youth subculture literature (see Bennett
& Kahn-Harris, 2004a), and as I discovered throughout my project, the idea of a ‘subculture’ can
be somewhat misleading with its intimation of clearly demarked boundaries and membership.

Nonetheless, I retain my use of the term in recognition that it is the closest approximation to

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\(^{22}\) While I had originally thought to do some cross-comparative work between the different activist cultures across
the three cities in which the research took place, I ultimately found far more similarities than differences between
my study sites, in both the unspoken rules of activist subcultures as well as participants’ experiences of schooling
and citizenship education. This may reflect the mobility of [middle class] young people across Canada; many of the
participants I spoke to in one city had spent time in one of the other study cities, or had grown up in another
community in Canada. This is, in part, due to the ‘hub’ nature of Canada’s large cities, which tends to draw many
young people away from rural or smaller urban communities due to greater opportunities and the appeal of greater
cultural and ethnic diversity. While I do not engage in a sustained comparative analysis of the differences between
activist cultures across the three cities, one notable distinction was the explicit anarchist analysis that was prevalent
in Montreal, far more developed than in either Toronto or Vancouver. Indeed, those participants who identified with
an anarchist analysis in Toronto or Vancouver had inevitably spent time in Montreal. The strength of anarchism as a
mode of analysis there may be due to the strong history in Quebec of both separatist activism and trade unionism, a
history that seems to have sustained a much more vibrant activist culture across all ages and social locations.
what was often identified by participants themselves as a ‘culture’, a ‘subculture’ or, sometimes and in half-jest, a ‘cult.’ That is, as loose and flexible as the boundaries might be, nonetheless participants seemed to be able to identify and describe something that I am calling a ‘youth activist subculture’ – whether it was through their own sense of inclusion or exclusion, or by being able to describe the unspoken associated rules. Thus, as also noted in Chapter 1, I am using the term ‘activist subcultures’ as a sort of shorthand, to sum up a diverse but nonetheless recognizable group. While this necessarily imprecise term somewhat problematically incorporates sub-groups (such as student activists and community-based activists) that may feel antagonistic towards each other (while often simultaneously sharing members), nonetheless there is a certain shared culture that came out across my field work, enough to justify (for me, at least), the continuing use of ‘activist subcultures’ to describe this range of actors.

One final note on my use of the word ‘youth’: this was also, on occasion, a contentious term, one which some of the participants (particularly the older ones) did not see as descriptive of themselves and their experiences. As noted above, while the research included many still in their teens, and the average age of participants was 23, some of the participants were as old as 29. While in keeping with the ever-stretching definition of ‘youth’ within liberal democratic countries (Wyn & Dwyer, 2000), this age range is rather broader than that of some of the classic studies of youth subcultures, which focus more on older teens or, in some cases, those in their early 20s. I chose to include some ‘older youth’ (i.e. age 26 and older) in this study, as I generally found their reflections to be useful in orienting me to the wider histories and influences on youth activism within each city. The use of the term ‘youth’ was also troubling because I was only a few years older than my oldest participants (I turned 32 the year that I carried out my fieldwork). In some cases, these ‘older youth’ ultimately became friends and colleagues in other
activist projects. One of the ethical problems with the term was thus the way in which it could (falsely) distance me from my research participants, reinforcing the dichotomy between the ‘researcher’ (read: adult) and the participants (the ‘youth’).

‘Youth’ also serves to reinscribe a category that has only emerged since the post-war period, and has been contested by some as essentializing and unnecessarily diminutive and/or dismissive (Adams, 1997; Gauvreau, 2003). It is also a term which has been identified as dissonant with the other major focus of this thesis: citizenship (Bynner, Chisholm, & Furlong, 1997; France, 1998). That is, ‘youth’ are necessarily not yet able to be ‘citizens’ in the full meaning of the term, as they are not seen to have yet achieved full adult ‘independence’ (read: economic independence). While acknowledging these complexities and troubling distinctions here, it remains the case that the majority of my participants were ‘youth’ in the common sense understanding of the term (that is, in their late teens or early twenties, not yet engaged in a full-time career, and not yet raising children or in a settled long-term relationship)23. It is also true that the activist cultures with which they were associated were generally overwhelmingly peopled by other ‘youth,’ and that these were the cultures they reflected upon during our interviews, and that I witnessed through field-work. Thus, as problematic a term as it may be in many ways, I continue to use the term ‘youth’ to demarcate my study group.

3.4.2 Analyzing data

I began analyzing my data immediately after I completed the first interview, and continued to do so throughout my field work and over many months afterwards. This was not intentional, nor derived from any particular philosophy of data analysis. It simply reflects the reality of being a researcher excited about my work and eager to sort out the implications of what I was learning. Although some

23 This list of ‘adult’ attributes is of course troubling for all of the ways in which it valorizes particular forms of relationship and life trajectories over others.
approaches to data analysis suggest waiting until all data has been collected before embarking on analysis (see for example Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), the time pressures of a doctoral program, combined with the overwhelming amount of data that an ethnography ultimately generates, made this seem to me an unfeasible option. Rather, my approach more closely matches the following description:

Conducting analysis involves going over data again and again, whether listening to recordings or reading transcripts or documents, noting features of interest but not settling on these. It involves working through the data over quite a long period, returning to them a number of times. Data analysis is not accomplished in one or two sessions (Taylor, 2001, p.39).

In my case, I considered the initial interview, and the notes that I took throughout, one step in the process of “going over data again and again,” later followed by reading and re-reading transcripts.

Ultimately, these early stages of analysis proved invaluable in guiding me through what could sometimes be an overwhelming process of analyzing and writing up the results of this research. After my first participant left my apartment, where we had carried out the interview, I scratched out a list of themes that had emerged from our broad-ranging conversation. I continued to do this after every interview, based on my memory of each. I also tried to work through themes, theories, and dilemmas within my field notes. For example, here is an excerpt from field notes written in Montreal on November 6, 2006, at which point I was about two-thirds of the way through all of my interviews:

How, ultimately, will I position all of these strands? There definitely seems to be this thing I’m calling a working-class/middle-class habitus playing out, although it is uneven and expressed differently by different people. But where does this pressure to consume in particular ways come into it? And how would [name of participant]’s highly individualistic approach to politics coincide with the less individualistic but still focused-on-consumer-choices practices of other activists? I think this is where the neoliberal subjectivity comes in – because Canadian schooling focuses so little on structures, unless people have received education in the ways in which these structures are pervasive, and are not about individual
choices, then the only recourse they feel they have to social change is through individual choice.

This excerpt references two of the major themes within this thesis: the subcultural positioning of youth activism (the middle-class/working class habitus, which I ultimately called ‘performing grunge’) and the influences of the wider cultural sphere of the Canadian state (neoliberalism, consumerism, and individualism). By working through some thoughts and ideas at this early stage in the data collection, I was able to generate a set of codes that I later used through the more formal data analysis carried out with my fieldnotes, and the transcripts of my interviews and focus groups.

The formal process of coding happened in two stages, enforced more by my limited funds and access to technology than by any methodological requirements. I began coding by word processor, using the ‘track changes’ function of Microsoft Word to note the occurrence of themes throughout interviews, then cutting and pasting data into single documents, organized by theme. I was then alerted to the availability of an open access (otherwise known as ‘free’) data analysis software program (called Weft-QDA, www.pressure.to/qda). I completed the data analysis of the remaining interviews and focus groups (about half) using this software, which essentially functioned to organize my data into similar documents that I had produced through Microsoft Word, but consuming much less time in the process! The advantage of the data analysis software was that it permitted me to easily code both themes and interview questions (for example, I marked each interview question within the transcripts with a brief descriptor of the content of the question, e.g. ‘age’), which made it substantially easier to later find collective information on participants such as age or family background.
Of course, the coding of data is only one aspect of a much more complex process of working to make sense of the social and cultural worlds represented by the ethnography. Some of the hunches and ideas that I developed early in the data collection remained consistent throughout, and appear within the pages of this final document. Other ideas were abandoned along the way, or modified to better represent the complex realities of a complex world. This brief sketch of my process for ‘analyzing data’ can thus only capture the basic mechanics of it, without necessarily reflecting the conceptual and intellectual work required to make the transformation from ‘data’ into thesis.

3.4.3 Class histories, ethnic identities

One example of the process by which I analyzed data, and the conceptual thinking that informed it, follows here. I began this research project without a particular focus on class, instead curious about how youth activists understood citizenship and democracy and used these concepts within their practices. However, after only a few interviews it became clear to me that class played a more powerful mediating role within youth activism than I had previously considered. Even so, I was surprised when I sat down to compile the class histories of the 38 participants for whom I had this data (excluding those who only took part in the focus groups) to find that the majority of them came from middle or upper middle class family backgrounds. I include this information here, alongside a description of how I analyzed the data in this case, in order to provide the reader with some further context through which to understand the analysis that follows alongside the ethnographic data in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I also discuss, in broad terms, the ethnicity of the participants below.
In order to ascertain the class histories of my participants, I compiled a table (below) which categorizes the class histories of my research participants. I developed these categories based on interview data in which I queried participants about parental occupation and higher education, as well as their own access to higher education. There is a specific ethical issue associated with this, because it meant that I was interpreting their class history, rather than allowing participants to locate themselves. Indeed, one participant who attended an early presentation of this research said to me afterwards, “I don’t remember talking about class!” — much to my relief, she seemed amused rather than upset that I had taken the analysis in this direction. My rationale for treating class in this way was my sense that asking people to describe their family history (see interview protocol, appendix 1) would provide a richer framework within which to understand their class locations, as well as other relevant aspects of their activist development. This seemed a better starting point than a simple question such as ‘what class did you grow up in?’ . This, I thought, would neither elicit such rich data nor necessarily provide an accurate account, given the subjective nature of class affiliations, and how the pervasive belief in the universality of middle classness holds sway within a country such as Canada (that is, both those from poor or working class histories and those from highly affluent families will identify themselves as ‘middle class’).

In order to turn this rich data into class categories, I drew in part on the typology offered by Sherry Ortner (2003), in which she specified the class location of her research participants based on family occupational history. In her ethnography of graduates from her own high school class of 1958, she divided her participants into three class categories, based on the occupation of the primary breadwinner within the family: business/professional class (BPC), middle class, and

\[\text{\textsuperscript{24}}\text{Some participants did describe their class identity, generally as either middle class or working class, through the course of our interview. Usually, their own identification was similar to the one that I subsequently made based on parental occupation.}\]
working class (2003, p. 30). Within her categories, the BPC generally included doctors, lawyers and owners of larger businesses; the middle class included teachers, bookkeepers, and owners of small businesses; and the working class included manual labourers and tradespeople. While noting that occupational history has been controversial within academic studies as an indicator of class, she suggests that “the mixture of cultural factors (prestige notions about different kinds of work) and Marxist assumptions (about the importance of position within a mode of production) renders occupation a reasonable mode of defining and ordering class positions” (p 30). She also notes, however, that other criteria such as education, income, and lifestyle can shape one’s subjective perception of both one’s own and others’ class position. I would further add that immigration history plays an important role in shaping class, especially within the context of a state such as Canada that brings in skilled labour to make up for labour shortages without recognizing credentials from other countries (particularly ‘Third World’ or ‘developing’ countries) (Abu-Laban, 1998).

Given these criteria, I have created a modified set of categories to describe the class history of my participants, although recognizing that such categories are not strictly bound by class. I have followed Ortner in her categorization of BPC, middle class, and working class, but have added the category ‘immigrant middle class to working class’ to highlight the common situation of immigrant families having come from middle class histories in their countries of origin, but accessing only working class jobs once they reach Canada. Given that the majority of my participants were either still living at home, or had just recently left their parents’ home, I think it is legitimate to categorize their class history based on parental occupation, in consideration of what a pivotal role this would have played in shaping their own access to both material and cultural capital. However, ‘class’ is not always this neatly defined, and a table such
as this is not adequate for reflecting such complexity. For example, one participant began life in a wealthy family with an entrepreneurial father who later left home. The participant and his mother struggled to make ends meet until the mother acquired further training and became a stock promoter, thus able to again bring in a high income. Within the typology I have created, I categorized this participant within the BPC category, but obviously this does not capture his complex class history. Another issue with respect to taking parental occupational history as the primary marker of class is that often one parent’s work would be classified within one category, and the other in another (a lawyer married to a legal secretary, for example). In those cases, I classified participants within the higher class location, which generally seemed consistent with participants’ reported experiences of growing up and the types of opportunities they had (educational and extra-curricular). Finally, the question of which professions belong in which categories is a difficult one, and was troubling to Ortner as well. On this issue, she writes,

> Readers will surely differ regarding which occupations should go in which class locations. Is a musician, or a pharmacist, or a rabbi really a member of the BPC? There is no final answer, because it is a cultural system on which different people have different readings. I have tried to approximate what I take to be the standard or dominant view (2003, p 31).

Similar to Ortner, I have attempted to classify professions following both her typology (thus placing Imam and owner of dance company in the BPC, for example), as well as my own sense of the broader context of each individual’s story (thus there is a ‘salesman’ in the middle class category, but a person who does telephone sales in the working class category). That class is both aligned with occupational histories, and much messier than that, is an indisputable fact of social research. Despite these complexities, the aggregate results of the class histories of my 38 participants across three provinces is overwhelmingly middle and business/professional class. The following is a table that demonstrates the distribution across categories:
Table 1: Class location by parental occupational history, N = 38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Location</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business/Professional class (BPC) = 18 (47%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class = 11 (29%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant middle class to working class = 5 (13%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class = 4 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Noteworthy is that even those few participants who came from a working class or immigrant-middle-class-to-working-class history have since made a class shift, either by attending institutions of higher education or, in one case, through comparable professional achievements which included holding political office and starting a not-for-profit organization.

Questions about family history also elicited rich data about participants’ national, ethnic, and cultural histories. Rather than breaking these down along lines of specific national, ethnic or cultural identities (of which there would often be only one participant per category), I have divided participants into two categories that are broadly similar to the forms of ‘short-hand’ used within the wider Canadian culture, and within youth activist communities themselves, about questions of ‘race’/ethnicity: that is, I have divided my participants into those who are ‘white’ and those who are ‘visible minority or Aboriginal’. Of the 41 participants who took part in this research project, they can be over-simplistically described as follows:

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25 Professions included within the BPC: lawyer, university or college professor, dentist, religious leader, advertising consultant, dancer/started dance company, accountant, stockbroker, animal behaviouralist, owner of mid-to-large business, chemist, stock exchange trader.

26 Professions included within middle class: teacher, scientist (not at university), government employee, writer, filmmaker, social worker, motel manager, salesman, owner of small business.

27 Professions included in immigrant middle class to working class and working class: factory worker, trucking, sales (telephone), labourer, secretary, physiotherapist’s assistant, hairdresser, taxi driver.

28 Throughout the thesis, I use ‘visible minority’ and ‘people of colour’ interchangeably. I recognize that each term has its own issues and restrictions, and use them interchangeably in partial recognition of this complex social reality, wrought from fraught histories of Canadian racism. DePass and Quereshi (2002), for example, note their own preference for the term ‘people of colour’ “because it is a self-selected term for self-definition” (p. 177). ‘Visible
This characterization, of course, vastly oversimplifies the complex racial, class, and migration histories of participants. For example, it lumps together ‘white’ participants whose families migrated from Britain several generations ago with ‘white’ participants whose parents arrived recently from impoverished countries in Eastern Europe. Similarly, it collapses differences of class, culture and identity associated with coming from an affluent family born in Hong Kong versus a refugee family from Africa or South America. Nonetheless, the appearance of participants as ‘white’ or as ‘visible minority’ or Aboriginal often mediated their experiences of belonging and citizenship within Canada (for reasons addressed further in the chapters to follow). Noteworthy is that class histories cannot be easily mapped onto this categorization of ‘race’/ethnicity: in other words, there were both middle class and working class participants in both groups. The more complex manner in which I see class and ‘race’ as intersecting will, I hope, become more apparent in the analysis described in chapters 6 and 7.

3.5 Summary: enacting a phenomenological and hermeneutic cultural ethnography

The diverse aspects of my methodological approach, informed by an interdisciplinary theoretical apparatus, draws together the philosophical insights of Paul Ricoeur with the cultural sociological approaches of Paul Willis and Pierre Bourdieu, and the semiotic analysis of Norman Fairclough. As the base epistemology informing this research project, phenomenology and hermeneutics require a process of contextualization through which I have incorporated both history as an important sociological detour and discourse analysis. Similarly, this epistemology

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minority’ maintains focus on the context of Canada as a white-dominant society in which one’s ‘invisibility’ is often concurrent with ‘whiteness’ (see Brand, 1994).
demands reflexivity through the research process, which forms an important complement to ethnography’s focus on the cultural every day. This chapter also outlined in detail the methods used throughout this research project, how participants were found and their age and gender, the ways in which data were analyzed, and the class and ‘race’ histories of participants. It also reflected on some of the more troubling complexities associated with issues of ‘writing up’ as well as the use of the terms ‘youth’ and ‘subcultures.’

Ultimately, it is my hope that this chapter will help situate the reader within the frameworks and assumptions that were present throughout the implementation of this research project, and the associated data analysis. In many ways, the research questions that I found the most compelling were inseparable from the choice of methods – as I was pulled deeper into the world of activist youth cultures, with the associated privilege of being privy to the stories of multiple participants across three cities, it was impossible to escape an analysis that reflected on both the wider cultural sphere of the Canadian nation-state, and the more specific cultures of youth activist communities themselves. Such an analysis would have been unthinkable if I had limited myself to, say, surveys, or even carried out only interviews without the associated fieldwork and visual ethnographic elements of the project. Thus the methods, and associated methodologies that informed them, form an integral aspect of the kinds of analyses that are possible, revealing as they do both the divergent aspects of the ‘cultural every day’ of the participants, and the wider cultural sphere of the Canadian nation-state within which they live and act as youth activists.
4 TRACING THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT: CONSTRUCTING THE ‘GOOD CITIZEN’

One of the central contentions of this thesis is that contemporary notions of the ‘good citizen’ play a formative role in shaping the cultural space within which Canadian young people can approach action and activism within the public sphere. The dilemma that this chapter attempts to address, then, can be stated most simply like this: ‘how did we get here?’, where the ‘here’ in this case represents the specific array of cultural and institutional forces shaping contemporary notions of the ‘good citizen.’ As I argued in chapter 3, Ricoeur (1998 (1981)) suggests that any hermeneutic analysis of the present benefits from a historical ‘detour’ through the past, as a window of perception into the current problematics and structures faced by today’s actors. Likewise, Rose (1999) and Bourdieu (2005) both insist that any attempt to understand social and political configurations must begin with a radical historicization of any concepts that play a powerful role in contemporary political discourse (such as freedom, democracy, and citizenship). The chapter is therefore concerned with demonstrating the history of the construction of the ‘good and moral citizen’ within the Canadian state, as glimpsed through schooling for citizenship. It will document the development of citizenship education since the inception of broadly available public schooling in Canada around the 1850s, tracing its history into the present moment. The chapter will conclude with a discourse analysis of contemporary civics curricula across the three provinces within which my study took place. This discourse analysis is intended to augment the detour, drawing out the connections and disparities between past and present. As such, this chapter takes Ricoeur’s concept of the ‘historical detour’ and expands it in order to assess the cultural realities of youth activists in Canada through the ‘ideological detour’ of the construction of the ‘good citizen.’ That is, this thesis contends that a
more in-depth appreciation of the historical and contemporary forces associated with the idea of
the ‘good citizen’ can help us to better understand the specific cultural pressures felt by
contemporary young activists attempting to work for social change.

The historical aspects of this detour are necessarily partial, incomplete and imperfect. It
draws on existing historical studies, looking to the multiple interpretations of other scholars in
order to construct this particular cumulative story of the construction of the ‘good citizen.’ This
‘detour’ helps illuminate the ways in which morality, identity, and belonging are implicated in
the story of the Canadian nation, recognizing that profoundly moral claims have always shaped
the idea of the ‘citizen.’ Thus, I intend to provoke questions about how we can begin to uncover
and think through the morality claims made by the state, and understand the links these carry to
young people’s classification struggles (Bourdieu, 1984; see also Kennelly & Dillabough,
forthcoming) – in other words, to understand how the notion of the ‘good citizen’ is deeply
classed, raced, and gendered, and how these aspects are mobilized by young people attempting to
work out their relationship to each other and to the nation-state itself. The participants who will
be represented in subsequent chapters are both products of this state, and are also attempting to
resist its impacts. The history of the ‘good citizen’ and its link to action within the public sphere
nonetheless make their appearance within the stories that the activists tell – their moral claims
about themselves and those around them can never be entirely separated from this context. This
is not to suggest that the young people of this study are created by this history in any
straightforward causal relationship – rather, it is to acknowledge and assess the historical and
cultural spaces through which individuals must pass before coming to their own sense of the
world, and to recognize the inextricable nature of state claims about ‘the good,’ as a cultural
manifestation with material impacts. This is the detour’s intended use: to shed light on aspects of the present problematic in a manner that reveals hitherto unconsidered linkages and possibilities.

More specifically, this detour, as a hermeneutic device, is intended to partially reveal the classed and racialized aspects of the history of the ‘good citizen,’ and link it to the wider cultural pressures to be a particular kind of activist. My task is thus to uncouple the notion of ‘the activist’ from dominant ideas about freedom, democracy, etc – that is, I am attempting to move the dialogue away from the notion of activists as ‘moral subjects’ (who are fighting for freedom and democracy, for example) and towards understanding ‘the activist’ as a deeply classed and racialized category. This is not to suggest that individual young people engaged in activist practices are not motivated by ideals of freedom, democracy, or morality more generally; however, my argument is that those who are able to take up this identity are located as such within a specific class and ‘race’ imaginary (as well as, in different although connected ways, an imaginary influenced by assumptions about gender, ability and sexuality). What I hope to reveal in this chapter is the long history of morality claims by the state about the ‘good citizen’ that have always been inextricably linked to dominant concepts of ‘normalcy’ and all of its classed, raced, gendered, sexualized, and ableist baggage. In doing so, I am laying the groundwork for responding to the second research question listed in Chapter 1, which asks, “What part might the concept of the idealized ‘good citizen’ play in configuring the cultural processes and modes of operation within contemporary youth activist subcultures?”

4.1 The history of citizenship education in Canada: normalcy, exclusion and the legacy of colonialism

“Citizenship education, or what some call civics, tells the story of who gets to be considered the nation’s ‘real’, ‘normal’, ‘representative’ or ‘ideal’ citizen.”

Veronica Strong-Boag (1996, p. 128)
What have been the predominant moral claims about the ‘good citizen’ within citizenship education throughout Canada’s history? Primarily, as noted by Strong-Boag, citizenship education has been used to reinforce the idea of a ‘norm’; this norm, unsurprisingly, has generally been that of white, middle class, able-bodied, male heterosexuality. Citizenship education has also attempted to inscribe particular values, values that have shifted as the story of the nation itself has changed. From rugged pioneers to patriotic nation-builders to globally competitive philanthropists, citizenship education tells us the story of both who is considered the ‘ideal’ citizen, and what the priorities of the nation have been (Joshee, 2004; Sears, Clarke, & Hughes, 1999; Walter, 2003). In this section, I will work to unravel this portion of the history that has led us to the present moment, attempting to understand how we have gotten to the contemporary moment, which will be explored in greater detail through the following three ethnographic chapters.

4.1.1 Mid 19th to turn of the 20th century

The primary goal of public schooling from its inception in 1847, across the disparate colonies that would soon become Canada, was to instill patriotism within young people, where schools were intended to be a homogenizing force that would create ‘good Canadian citizens’ in the image of British loyalists (Joshee, 2004). Arising immediately on the heels of the political uprisings within Lower and Upper Canada of 1837 and 1838, schooling was seen by those in power to be one way to ensure the maintenance of civil order through cultivating students’ “sense of citizenship, loyalty, respect for property, and deference to authority” (Axelrod, 1997, p. 25). Those advocating for compulsory school attendance in the mid-nineteenth century (which would be implemented in almost all of the provinces by 1871) based their argument on the belief
that there was a fundamental lack amongst young people of the time of “public spirit, of collective energy, and enterprise” (Prentice, 1999, p. 47). This early period of broad-based education within Canada took place in a time when the pressures of nation-building were at a particular high. In 1867, Confederation brought together the four original colonies – Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario -- under one national state. Not long after, British Columbia also entered Confederation, the same year that it implemented a free-school system, in 1871 (Axelrod, 1997). Schooling was understood as one way to build and perfect a Canadian nation that would be second to none on the world stage of nations (Prentice, 1999).

The desire for a public school system, while explicitly claiming the project of developing good and loyal Canadian citizens, was also deeply concerned with the impacts of class differences in society. As Alison Prentice notes, education was seen as one way to “prevent the poor from robbing or murdering the rich” (1999, p. 67). Schooling was seen as a means through which to ensure the ‘respectability’ of the poor and working classes, where respectability meant mimicking the affects of the middle classes: “refined manners and taste, respectable religion, proper speech and, finally, [in English Canada] the ability to read and write proper English” (ibid, p. 68). It was understood as a peace-making institution, whereby the implementation of free education would bring the classes together to be bound by the experience of being schooled side-by-side (Prentice, 1999). To this end, although schooling was explicitly concerned with the development of good Canadian citizens who were loyal to the state, such democratic practices as public debate and disagreement were discouraged, and in their place Christian love, order and correct social behaviour were thought to ensure social cohesion (ibid). Thus the good (moral)

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29 There are other provinces, of course, in Canada, each with their own history of schooling, complete with local conflicts and tensions. I focus on Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, to the extent that I focus on any specific provinces within this chapter, because these were the three provinces in which I carried out my ethnography.
citizen of this period was the obedient, loyal, respectable individual of middle class comportment, if not middle class social position.

In addition to concerns with inter-class conflicts and their impact on the nation, concepts of citizenship within the Canadian nation-state have always been associated with a specific Euro-centric version of ‘whiteness.’ Within mainstream public schooling, schools were able to maintain the illusion of Canada as an exclusively white domain, with allegiance to the British monarch in English Canada, and loyalty to French culture and language within French Canada. As noted by Alison Prentice, “[Schools and] approved textbooks were designed to spread the doctrine of social harmony and progress, and to ignore or suppress the facts of social and political conflict” (p. 128). Such conflicts often took place around issues of ‘race,’ culture, and religious differences, and can be particularly seen through state attempts to suppress, segregate and assimilate Aboriginal peoples and various ethnic minorities. For example, Canadian Blacks, themselves either the descendents of slaves brought to Nova Scotia and Upper Canada in the 1750s, or escaped slaves from the United States, were normally educated in segregated Black-only schools, supported by legislation that was officially on the books until 1964 (Axelrod, 1997). Chinese students in British Columbia were forced into segregated schools, because they were thought to represent a moral, intellectual, social, and health threat to the other (white) students (Stanley, 2002).

For Aboriginal peoples, the concept of citizenship was an explicitly exclusionary one, and mainstream schooling historically misrepresented and maligned the realities of their culture and identity (as it largely continues to do today) (Battiste & Semaganis, 2002; Persson, 1986). The education of Aboriginal peoples throughout Canada’s history has been marked by an emphasis on either ‘civilizing’ or assimilating them to meet the moral imperatives of the
European settlers’ norms (Frideres, 1978). Such aims were carried out, in part, through the establishment of Residential Schools, which were used to separate Aboriginal children from their families and extinguish all traces of their Aboriginal culture, including their language. The perception of Aboriginal peoples that shaped these schools are reflected in this statement made by an Inspector of Schools in the mid-1800s:

Little can be done with (the Indian child). He can be taught to do a little at farming, and at stock raising, and to dress in a more civilized manner, but that is all. The child who goes to a day school learns little and what he learns is soon forgotten, while his tastes are fashioned at home, and his inherited aversion to toil is in no way combatted (as cited in Kirkness & Bowman, 1992, p 10).

Aboriginal peoples were thus seen as outside of the redemptive status of citizen, capable only of menial labour, and in dire need of ‘civilizing.’ Indeed, the government made it legally impossible for an ‘Indian’ to become a citizen of Canada; if an Aboriginal person did manage to conform to mainstream notions of success within Canadian schooling, and proceeded to university or attained a profession, the Canadian government would remove the government-inscribed category of ‘Indian’ from that person, and allow him (rarely, if ever, her) the right of enfranchisement (Coates, 1999).

Pierre Walter (2003) elaborates upon the citizenship education strategies aimed at immigrant men working in rural camps by Frontier College between 1899 and 1933. He describes the image provided in literacy readers of ‘The Good Citizen’: “The imagined Canadian here is a man who now locates himself in an upright hierarchy of personal identity with God as superior, followed by Empire, Canada, and the family. The good Canadian man is protector of weaker females, is diligent, helpful to others, honest, and clean but does not deny his virile campman masculinity” (2003, p 47). In order to provide examples of such exemplar citizens, Frontier College sent white, college-educated men to teach this curriculum. Walter notes, “Here,
the idea was that contact with ‘wholesome,’ clean-living, loyal Canadian, English-speaking men who could nonetheless do a hard day’s work in a logging, mining, or rail camp would serve as the model of good citizenship immigrant men would emulate” (2003, p 49). The immigrant men who were exposed to this education had themselves been subjected to a racialized selection process in order to determine who could come to Canada in the first place. Walter notes the following racial hierarchy applied at the turn of the century in considering which immigrants to Canada would make the best Canadians:

At the top of the hierarchy were English-speaking British and American immigrants – the racial norm – followed then by Scandinavians (Swedes, Norwegians, Danes and Icelanders)…Finnlanders, Jews, Italians, Germans, and German Austrians were also rated near the top of the hierarchy…Greeks, Levantines (Armenians, Syrians, and Turks), and “Orientals” (Japanese, Chinese, and “Hindoos”) then occupied the last three rungs of the racial ladder, respectively, each rung embellished with a description of their history before coming to Canada and of their “racial characteristics” (Walter, 2003, p 51).

As Walter notes, the criteria used to evaluate the particular suitability of these ‘races’ of people were “their religious faith, traditions of education, industriousness, frugality, potential loyalty to the Canadian nation, and notable in its relevance to the particularly Canadian construction of nation, their obedient nature and physical prowess” (Walter, 2003, p 51).

The construction of the ‘good citizen’ through such educational endeavours cannot be separated from the prevailing immigration policies that explicitly shaped the Canadian population after a white imaginary. By the turn of the twentieth century, immigrants to Canada of non-European ancestry were excluded from acquiring citizenship (Joshee, 1996). Indeed, Canadian immigration policy has almost always explicitly favoured white Protestants; it has only been at times of insufficient labour that such rules have been relaxed, and incoming immigrants have not matched the white, preferably British, ideal (Abu-Laban, 1998). For example, Chinese
labourers and their families were asked to pay inordinate amounts in head taxes to immigrate between 1885 and 1923, and then were excluded from immigration altogether (Abu-Laban, 1998). These exclusions were also profoundly gendered, as many male Chinese labourers had come to Canada prior to 1885 in order to work on the building of the CP railway, and then were unable to bring their wives or children to join them in Canada. Japanese and South Asian immigrants were also actively discouraged from settling permanently in Canada (Abu-Laban, 1998).

To summarize, schooling from its inception as a broad-based, widely available and ultimately compulsory institution in the mid-nineteenth century and into the turn of the twentieth century was deeply influenced by the project of Canadian nation-building, a process that found its political expression with the original act of Confederation in 1867. Schooling was seen as an integral tool through which to produce obedient, loyal, respectable citizens modeled after a white, middle class imaginary. Dissent and public debate were strongly discouraged, and instead schooling focused on conformity to particular ideals that ultimately denigrated and denied the realities of working class, Aboriginal, and ethnic minority young people within the country. Although citizenship education did not yet exist as its own discreet curricular subject, the very nature of schooling in this period can be understood as primarily about the development of ‘good Canadian citizens.’ As such, citizenship was seen to belong to those who could conform to the dominant ideals of Christian respectability, a form of comportment that was nigh impossible to achieve for those not white, male\textsuperscript{30} and middle class.

\textsuperscript{30} Citizenship at this period was of course a predominantly male domain, whereby women were not yet seen as ‘persons’ under the law. Widows and spinsters received the first municipal franchise in Ontario in 1884; the first province to grant women suffrage rights was Manitoba in 1916 (Bélanger, 2005).
4.1.2 Early to Mid 20th century

The exclusionary nature of Canadian educational practices and the concomitant construction of the ‘good Canadian citizen’ continued into the 20th century. Joan Sangster (2002) analyzes how discourses of ‘good citizenship’ imbued attempts to educate poor and working class Canadian youth from 1920 to 1965. Such approaches were explicitly intended to prevent them from falling into ‘delinquency,’ or to re-impose social and moral norms upon those who had already so fallen. She describes the profoundly gendered ways in which citizenship education was applied to these young people, where “boys, it was assumed, should be re-molded into social citizens with respect for democracy, law, and the work ethic, while girls needed protection, discipline, and self-control in order to become model moral citizens” (2002, p 338). She highlights the role of middle-class social reformers, who saw themselves as compensating for the inadequate parenting assumed to be received by young people who grew up in poor and working class households. Although experts of the time would cite conditions such as poor housing as contributing to the likelihood of young people’s fall into delinquency, the emphasis inevitably returned to the impact of ‘bad parenting.’ This focus on individual faults, as opposed to social and economic inequities, set the stage for the efforts of middle class reformers like the Big Sisters organization in Hamilton, Ontario. The Big Sisters attempted to “uplift” their young charges by rallying older women who would “help girls to become good citizens” (as cited in Sangster, 2002, p 347). The Big Sisters explicitly saw their role as ensuring the future of the nation, through the development of appropriate sexual, feminine and moral characteristics amongst their young charges. As noted in a speech by one Big Sister, “guidance and understanding [have] helped girls accept their place in the community as worthwhile citizens – after all, these girls are the mothers of tomorrow” (as cited in Sangster, 2002, p 348).
Discourses of citizenship also had a profound impact on the differential treatment of young people caught in the juvenile court systems. As Sangster notes, “The ability of boys or girls to convince judges or court workers that they were on the road to reform rested not only on their actions and demeanour, but also on their family’s social persona, especially their parents’ embrace of good citizenship” (2002, p 350). Parents who were able to establish their own willingness and capacity to live within the strictures of “good citizenship” – including “their own moral propriety and dedications to the work ethic, or… their churchgoing and wholesome leisure activities” (Sangster, 2002, p 350) – were more likely to prevent their children from being sentenced to training schools. If a young person was unfortunate enough to be put in a training school – establishments that, Sangster notes, were essentially correctional institutions – his or her sentencing would often be justified by the judge as a means to provide “citizenship training for children seen to be at risk of becoming adult criminals or misfits” (Sangster, 2002, p 351). Once again, this form of ‘citizenship training’ took profoundly gendered and classed forms. As Sangster reports, these girls and boys were educated for “respectable” working-class labour, “in part because these working-class children were perceived to be best ‘fitted’ intellectually for such work” (2002, 352). This labour was divided along clear gendered lines, where girls were taught cooking, sewing or laundry work, while boys received training in carpentry, shoe repair, barbering, maintenance and auto mechanics (Sangster, 2002, p 353). Such divisions echoed the prevailing divisions within the state that saw men involved in ‘public’ work (that included duties of political citizenship such as voting), while women were relegated to the ‘private’ (which was believed to be entirely separate from the public sphere) (Arnot & Dillabough, 1999; Lister, 2003).
Lest we think that such gendered and classed surveillance was limited to young people identified as ‘delinquents,’ we need only look as far as mainstream schooling in the 1950s in Canada to see the ways in which discourses of normalcy penetrated every aspect of young peoples’ education. Mary Louise Adams (1997) points to an educational film first produced in 1947 and updated in 1958, called “Are You Popular?” She describes it as follows:

To make its point the film contrasts Ginny and Caroline. Ginny is the unpopular girl, packaged in multiple working-class signifiers. Her jewellery is big and gaudy, her clothes are fussy, her hair is too old for her age, she ‘yoo-hoos’ the other kids in the cafeteria. And, we find out from the solemn-toned male narrator, she goes parking with boys at night. Caroline, on the other hand, is very popular, in an easy kind of way (which is, of course, the right way). She is dressed simply. She greets her friends calmly and pleasantly. She is ‘interested in girls rather than boys.’ She offers to help with the school play. She does not ‘park’ with boys in their cars. She will, however, go on a date with a boy if it is okay with her mother. She will be home before an agreed-upon curfew. And, when she and her date arrive home, mother will greet them with a tray of fresh brownies. For both Caroline and Ginny, class, moral character, and popularity are indivisible (1997, p 90).

Such educational endeavours as the film described above clearly and blatantly reinscribed gendered and sexualized norms upon young people in Canadian schools. They carried within them the gendered and moral sub-texts of ‘citizenship,’ providing a range of examples of how one must shape oneself within the bounds of ‘normal.’ Such expressions of normalcy were, of course, also profoundly heterosexual. Queer bodies had no place in a mainstream classroom, much as they do not today. As Becki Ross notes, those who professed or acted upon same-sex desire could never be included as “fully fledged members or citizens of the Canadian nation. Rather, they were perceived as dangerous, sick, potential criminals and improperly socialized deviants” (1998, p 193).

Outside of public schooling, citizenship education for new immigrants shifted in emphasis from being primarily a political and moral enterprise at the turn of the century, to
becoming an economic enterprise by the 1940s (Joshee, 1996). That is, while citizenship education for new immigrants had as its stated aims to ‘prepare adult immigrants for life in Canada,’ what this meant in practice was educating them in one of the two official languages so that they could quickly and easily be assimilated into the economy (ibid).

4.1.3 1960s to 1980s

Janine Brodie (2002) evaluates the shifting emphases of Canadian citizenship by analyzing the Speeches from the Throne since Canada’s inception as a nation. From the early 1960s, she notes, the Speeches from the Throne began to focus less on specific legislative priorities and more on core Canadian values, identity, and national unity, in an effort to describe ‘who we are.’ This coincided with the rise of Quebec nationalism and separatism, rapid immigration that was beginning to noticeably shift the population from a white settler society to a multi-racial and multi-ethnic society, and the intensification of globalization (Brodie, 2002). The 1960s marked the apex of the social citizen (Marshall, 1992 (1950)), when the government promised to support and provide for all Canadians through the provisions of the social welfare state (Brodie, 2002). The recessions and oil shocks of the 1970s saw this shift from a commitment to all Canadians to become a focus only on those in need, whereby the rest of the country’s citizens were expected to “sacrifice when times were tough” (Brodie, 2002, p. 61). The 1980 Speech from the Throne noted that “Canadians will accept sacrifice” and they understand that “the state cannot meet every demand or satisfy every group” (as cited by Brodie, 2002, p. 61). This marked the beginning of an ever-growing emphasis on individual over state responsibility for citizen well-being, one of the hallmarks of neoliberalism.
Although little has been written on education from this period, with even less on citizenship education, the available research suggests that this was a period of contestation between an emerging ‘progressivism’ within education (with its own roots within the social gospel movement and Deweyan democratic educational philosophy (Titley, 1990)) and the ‘back-to-basics’ call of those hoping to return to a more standardized, traditional manner of schooling (Titley and Mazurek, 1990). Education at this time also came to be seen more explicitly as a form of investment, developing ‘human capital’ in order to compete in the expanding technological markets. Federal government spending on higher education increased dramatically, reflecting this shifting state priority (Titley and Mazurek, 1990). As Titley and Mazurek note,

The result of all this was a veritable mania for education throughout the 1960s and into the first half of the 1970s. Between 1960 and 1975 national expenditure on education at all levels rose from $1,706,000,000 to $12,228,000,000 – a seven-fold increase” (Titley and Mazurek, 1990, p. 115).

The result, not surprisingly, was higher retention rates; whereas only 35% of students had completed high school in 1961, that number rose to 75% in 1976 (Titley and Mazurek, 1990, p. 115). However, this increase did not necessarily translate into an increase in equality of opportunity. As Young (1990) notes, “What we may be doing is simply spending an increasingly larger portion of the gross national product to increase the disparity between those who receive the greatest rewards, both financial and social, and those who receive the least” (Young, 1990, p.166).

The focus on progressivism within education, though short-lived, reached its zenith during this period. This shift was heralded by the emergence of a plethora of reports on education in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These reports were “inspired by the ideas of every
progressive writer from Rousseau to Dewey, [and] exuded unbounded optimism regarding the potential benefits of its pedagogical prognosis. The approach [they] advocated would benefit all children and foster equal opportunity while combatting ignorance, poverty, and prejudice” (Titley and Mazurek, 1990, p.116). It was during this period that standardized exams began to be phased out, and alternative schools began to appear. Multiculturalism as an official government policy also appeared during this period, and was promptly incorporated into schooling (Mazurek and Kach, 1990). This period was experienced as an opportunity for greater flexibility and autonomy for teachers, and the incorporation of more non-traditional subjects into education (Titley and Mazurek, 1990); this presumably included opportunities for incorporating alternative, non-normative conceptions of citizenship into every day practices of schooling and curriculum.

The expansive optimism and experimentation of the period soon came to an end, however. By the 1970s, most of the alternative schools were either abandoned or absorbed into the public school system (Titley and Mazurek, 1990). New reports were being issued that suggested the schools needed to return to the traditional curriculum emphases that had been briefly dislocated in the 1960s. Much of the perceived educational malaise was blamed on teachers, and standardized exams began to be re-instituted. As Titley and Mazurek suggest, “Economic recession was the principal culprit for the descent from the clouds” (p. 119).

Outside of schooling, shifting notions of the citizen reflected the emergent policy emphasis on multiculturalism as well as the rise of the ‘human capital’ model of social relations. Although immigration policy became less explicitly racist after 1967, Abu-Laban argues that the implementation of a point system that rated immigrants on the basis of their ‘skills’ served to reinforce disadvantages faced by potential immigrants on the basis of class, gender, and geographic location (which is often connected to ‘race’/ethnicity) (1998, p 76). And even though
immigrants were (and are) granted admission on the basis of skills, citizenship in Canada still does not offer equal access to social, political and economic parity (DePass & Qureshi, 2002; Mata, 2002). Visible minority groups in Canada, and immigrants in particular, continue to be subject to higher rates of unemployment, lower incomes even if they are employed, and greater likelihood of working at manual labour jobs than the rest of the population (Mata, 2002, p 192). Joshee points out that the immigrant version of citizenship education can be differentiated from school-based citizenship education for Canadians-by-birth in that the ultimate expression of citizenship participation is seen to be naturalization, rather than voting (1996, p 118). These programs serve to maintain the stratification of Canadian society in two important ways: “by insisting from the outset that only those of non-British origin needed to be trained to be part of the society, and by teaching immigrants about the superiority of (British) Canadian ways” (Joshee, 1996, p 117).

The 1960s and 1970s were, of course, also a period of increased social movement activity; although movements in Canada were highly influenced by the civil rights, feminist, and other social movements within the United States, they took on their own distinct character and quality within the Canadian milieu (Kostash, 1980). Noteworthy for this project is that histories of Canadian social movements from this era are consistent in suggesting that people involved in the movements at the time were widely middle class and white (pace, the title of a book on social movements in Canada, Germany and the US: Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties) (Kostash, 1980; Levitt, 1984). This provides some context and insight, perhaps, into the story of the parents of participants within this research project who were themselves involved in social movements and passed on their knowledge of these contexts to their children (more on this in Chapter 6).
4.2 Citizenship education today: the responsible, self-perfecting subject

“As since the 1980s...the entrepreneurial citizen of nineteenth-century liberalism, never fully cloaked from view, has multiplied and spread to encompass most of the population”
- Robert Menzies, Robert Adamoski and Dorothy E. Chunn (2002, p. 23)

As discussed in previous chapters, Canada has been highly influenced by the ideology of neoliberalism which first came into full force within Britain and the United States in the early 1980s. This swing towards neoliberalism has resulted in substantial retrenchment within education, welfare, and social services, intensifying ties with the United States through trade agreements, and an accompanying rhetoric of strategic individualism and meritocratic measurement (Apple, 1993; Weis, 2004; Dillabough, Kennelly & Wang, 2008).

Concomitant to this cultural, political and economic shift has come an increasing anxiety about the capacity and willingness of young people to participate in the nation-state, thought to be captured by statistics documenting dropping voter turn-out amongst those under the age of 35 (Pammett & LeDuc, 2003; Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006). The response to this perceived inadequacy amongst young people has been a recent surge in citizenship education across liberal democratic states (Best, 2003; Ichilov, 2005; Levinson, 2003); such initiatives have taken a wide-ranging array of approaches, including global education, civics education, and character education. Canada is no exception to this trend. In British Columbia, a new Civics 11 curriculum was implemented in 2005, and is one of three optional credits that students can take to complete their social science requirement; in Ontario, the new Civics 10 came into effect in 2002, and is a required course for all Grade 10 students; in Quebec, the new History and Citizenship education module was introduced as part of the Social Sciences curriculum in 2004.

Educational discourse is a powerful arbitrator of cultural norms within societies. Whether these norms are taken up, resisted, or co-opted, education unquestionably acts as a key cultural
Discourse analysis is a tool for assessing the ideological and regulatory elements of discourse, as well as for investigating those traces of the past which remain within contemporary discourse. As Fairclough and Wodak (1997) describe in relation to the related methodology of critical discourse analysis (CDA), “Both the ideological loading of particular ways of using language and the relations of power which underlie them are often unclear to people. CDA aims to make more visible these opaque aspects of discourse” (p. 258). I have drawn on the tool of discourse analysis in order to analyze the claims currently being made within educational documents about the ‘good citizen,’ as exemplified within citizenship education curriculum from the three provinces used for this study. My intention here is to highlight some of the common-sense and often taken-for-granted language used within these curricula, and scrutinize the ideological effects that such language can create within the cultural and public frame (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997).

I carried out a discourse analysis on the following three curriculum documents from British Columbia, Quebec (English only) and Ontario: Civic Studies 11, Integrated Resource Package (BC) (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005); History and Citizenship Education (Quebec), as part of Chapter 7, Social Sciences (Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport, 2004); and Civics, as part of a larger document entitled The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10, Canadian and World Studies (revised), (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Each was freely available on their respective Ministry of Education websites. Although my level of French comprehension is not detailed enough to permit me to do a proper discourse analysis on the French language curriculum documents in Quebec (Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport, 2006), I have sufficient knowledge of the language to allow me to do a rough

31 As noted in Chapter 3, my use of discourse analysis is strongly influenced by CDA, including the theoretical presuppositions that undergird it. However, I have not completed all of the steps necessary for the technical requirements of a CDA, according to Fairclough (2001).
comparison of the two documents. I noted that the curriculum was structured along similar lines to the English curriculum: for example, both incorporated geography, history and citizenship education into the same social studies curriculum, and the opening introduction to each appeared to be almost direct translations of each other.

I began by reading through the documents to get a sense of the language used. I found the three to be broadly similar in tone and content, although the Quebec curriculum carried a stronger emphasis on history and its utility for contemporary citizenship. While reading, I noted the recurrence of certain ‘key words’ associated with citizenship (see also Williams, 1976(1990), for a discussion of the role of ‘key words’ in discourse). In order to better assess their frequency and usage, I used the ‘find’ feature of Adobe Acrobat, searching all three documents for the words ‘responsible’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘responsibilities.’ I chose one of the documents to carry out a more detailed discourse analysis, searching the BC curriculum for every mention of ‘citizen’ or ‘citizenship’ in order to better assess how the term was used. I also did a search in all three documents for the words ‘activist’, ‘activism’ and ‘protest,’ described further in Chapter 5.

It is important to reiterate here that this empirical exercise was a relatively minor one, particularly in relation to the ethnography which comprised the vast majority of my research. Rather, this component of the detour is meant to better describe the broader context within which young activists are acting, by assessing the submerged claims that are being made within state documents (such as public school curriculum) about the desirable ‘good citizen.’

The results of this brief discourse analysis were revealing. In the Quebec curriculum, out of twelve references to the words ‘responsible,’ ‘responsibility’ or ‘responsibilities,’ six of these were linked to the concept of citizenship: for example, “students thus have a concrete opportunity to reflect and to act in the spirit of responsible citizenship” (Ministère de l'Éducation
I found this use of ‘responsibility’ within the curriculum documents interesting. First of all, the pairing of ‘rights’ with ‘responsibilities’ is a pervasive semantic device that, while appearing innocuous enough, can also be understood to be performing a particular ideological function. For example, it serves to remind young would-be citizens that any rights they may be entitled to in Canada come with obligations to the state. That is, the emphasis is most decidedly not on the claims they may make on the state as its citizens. Why is there not a section in these curricular documents titled “Your rights as a Canadian citizen”? Surely knowing what one is entitled to is as valid an aspect of citizenship education as understanding what your responsibilities to the state might be.

If this focus on responsibilities over rights was not clear enough through the perpetual pairing of the two concepts, the repeated emphasis on responsibility, as it is linked to citizenship (i.e. ‘responsible citizenship’) serves to drive the point home. Nikolas Rose (1999) might see this emphasis as fitting neatly with the neoliberal subject’s perpetual requirement to be self-
perfecting and self-regulating. The constant reiteration of responsible citizenship is exemplified in this excerpt from the introduction to the BC Civics 11 curriculum:

Civic action refers to the ability and inclination of citizens to advance their own civic interests and effect social change effectively and responsibly. Engaging in responsible personal and social action encourages community membership and collective responsibility (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005, pp 12-13).

This passage is remarkable for managing to squeeze in three references to ‘responsibility,’ even while suggesting that civic action ought to be linked to social change and community. Thus, my key argument here is that the constant reiteration of ‘responsibility,’ in both its connections to citizenship and its tempering of the concept of ‘rights,’ can serve an ideological purpose.

Although not necessarily an intentional strategy on the part of the curriculum designers, the language of responsible citizenship used within these documents is highly consistent with broader cultural messages about what it currently means to be a ‘good (young) citizen’ today. That is, the language of the curricular documents does seem to shift the role of the individual away from being one who can make claims upon the state for protection and well-being, towards one who is both responsible to the state, and who must be self-regulating so as to lesson the claims made upon the state.

Of course, the recurring connection between ‘responsibility’ and ‘citizenship’ in the foregoing discourse analysis does not assess whether other associations to ‘citizenship’ might be more diverse. In order to better assess this, I looked for every instance of ‘citizen’ or ‘citizenship’ within one of the curricular documents (I randomly chose BC), and categorized how these terms were used and understood within the context of the curriculum. Of 100 occurrences of the words ‘citizen’ and ‘citizenship’, 38 were preceded by ‘active’ (e.g. ‘active citizenship’) and 11 were preceded by ‘informed’ (e.g. ‘informed citizenship’) – this was in addition to the 14
occurrences already linked to ‘responsible.’ Indeed, these two categories (‘active’ and ‘informed’ citizenship) were key concepts identified in an early diagram depicting the goals of Civics 11, and recurred throughout as components of the prescribed learning outcomes. Thirteen of the 38 occurrences of ‘active citizenship’ were paired with ‘responsible,’ ‘duty’ or ‘ethical behaviour’ (e.g. “demonstrate skills and attitudes of active citizenship, such as ethical behaviour…”, British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 22). A further 5 of the 38 occurrences of ‘active citizenship’ were linked to ‘informed.’ That is, although active citizenship was a desirable goal within the civics curriculum, it was almost always tempered by rational and responsible adjectives such as ‘informed’ or ‘ethical,’ or paired with the concept of ‘duties.’ Beyond these, ‘citizen’ or ‘citizenship’ tended to be linked to tasks for the students, rather than descriptors of the goals of civics (e.g. “create a statement of what it means to be a ‘Canadian citizen’” or “evaluate the citizen’s role in civic processes”, p. 23).

Taken together, I found the results of this discourse analysis of the three curricular documents revealing. Although the power of these discourses of citizenship within our society can make it a challenging task to dissect the associated ideological aspects, a careful analysis of the terms associated with citizenship reveal that a common thread of emphasis on being responsible, dutiful, ethical, and informed are found throughout. Rather than condemning the curriculum designers for this emphasis, it is important to recognize that the language used reflects the common sense use of terms such as ‘citizenship’ today, a common sense usage that has come about within a specific time and space. While the design of curriculum, like any social process, is bound to contain compromises and contestations, the prevalence of the idea of ‘responsible citizenship’ within the wider cultural sphere might make it difficult for curriculum designers to assess the harms that might be incurred through this repeated emphasis. That is, it
can be difficult for all of us to gain enough distance and perspective on the norms of our everyday lives to appreciate how they may be linked up to wider cultural and social pressures to behave in particular ways. This is how Rose and Foucault understood governmentality as functioning: through making it a personal process, enacted through one’s own beliefs about what is right and proper, we can inadvertently reproduce certain norms that actually limit democratic possibilities, rather than expand them. In this case, pairing ‘rights and responsibilities,’ connecting ‘responsible’ with ‘citizenship,’ and tempering ‘active citizen’ with ‘informed’ are so tightly linked to conceptions of good citizenship within our particular cultural realm that it can be difficult to disassociate them. These discourses are particularly compelling because of their congruence with the humanitarian, liberal democratic image that Canada consistently reproduces for itself.

The issue begins to emerge when we note how quickly the concept of ‘active citizenship’ is coupled with the cautionary words ‘responsible’, ‘ethical’ and ‘informed.’ The couplet of ‘informed and active’ suggests that citizenship might only be taken up by those reasonable and responsible individuals who take the time to deliberate on all aspects of a social issue before taking action. As noted in Chapter 2, Nikolas Rose has identified the ways in which the emergence of neoliberalism has intensified the subject-formation identified earlier by Foucault as essential to maintaining the compliance of citizens within liberal democracies. This form of subjectivity is the model for the desirable citizen within the context of neoliberal states, whose qualities include endless self-scrutiny, an individualized focus on one’s personal development over and above the well-being of the collective, and the capacity to continually re-negotiate one’s skills and identity in light of the demands of global capitalism (Raco, 2003; Rose, 1999). I would suggest that the repeated emphasis throughout all three curriculum documents on both
‘responsibility’ and ‘informed citizenship’ represents a discursive shift of the burdens of citizenship onto the individual, by continually reiterating the requirement to be self-regulating and self-scrutinizing. I see this as consistent with Rose’s (1999) assessment of neoliberal subjectivity; through my discourse analysis of citizenship education across the three provinces, we can see that even when the curricula mention such things as social change and community, the continual and repeated return to the notion of ‘responsibility’ becomes the ultimate individual, self-reflexive burden of the citizen in neoliberal times.

What the above discourse analysis does not reveal within these curricular documents is a response to the question of who gets to be a good citizen within neoliberal times. Yes, the citizen ought to be responsible, reasonable, informed, and active, but what happens if these forms of citizenship are only available to a few? What happens if the capacity to be ‘the good citizen’ rests only among those with the cultural and educational capital to do so? What happens if ‘citizenship,’ in this case, stands in for a particularly middle class *habitus*, a set of dispositions about how to behave in the world, that is only comprehensible to those who have developed such predispositions through family or relational associations that precede and supercede the educational setting? Further, what if the forms of citizenship made available are so tightly linked to the individual (the informed, responsible, ethical individual) that it ultimately bears little resemblance to the forms of collaborative, relational, interactive modes of action that young people who describe themselves as ‘activists’ tend to take? (More on this in Chapter 7.) In other words, what if the informed, responsible, ethical, active citizen, whose adjectives are already so tightly linked to both liberalism and neoliberalism, is indeed a classed, raced, and gendered subject which is more or less consistent with the history of ‘the good citizen’ in education’s past?
Such a claim is hard to substantiate from within these curricular documents. Indeed, they make an effort to incorporate an array of representatives of ‘active citizenship,’ at least within one task set for students. Asked to “investigate the work of model citizens,” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 55) examples given of such include two white, middle class men (Norman Bethune and Craig Keilburger), but also include an Aboriginal man (Frank A. Calder), a Japanese man (Roy Miki), and a white, middle class woman (Nellie McClung). Oddly, the list also includes Rosa Parks, an American citizen, perhaps intended to incorporate ‘women of colour’ within this neatly representative list. Thus the politics of representation function in this case to include an array of people within the concept of the ‘good citizen,’ perhaps attempting to suggest that the exclusions of the past are exactly that: of the past.

The social realities of young people within this study suggest otherwise, however. As noted by van Dijk (1993), while discourse analysis can help to reveal some of the ideological aspects of particular texts (in this case, the neoliberal ideology of the self-perfecting subject), it is not always possible to directly associate the forms of discourse used with the broader conditions of social inequality to which they may otherwise be linked. This is why discourse analysis is best understood within a wider context of sociological and socio-cultural inquiry, and why I am using it as only one aspect of this wider study. van Dijk states that “in order to relate discourse and society, and hence discourse and the reproduction of dominance and inequality, we need to examine in detail the role of social representations in the minds of social actors” (1993, p. 251).

In other words, in this case, we need to understand how young people attempting to enact their own forms of ‘active citizenship’, through activist practices, relate to each other, the state, and to citizenship education itself. These issues will be the concern of the remaining chapters of this thesis.
4.3 Summary: a hermeneutic detour through the construction of the ‘good citizen’

Beginning with the goals and priorities of public education as it was developed in the 1870s and into the turn of the century, Canadian educational practices have been concerned from the beginning with the production of the ‘good citizen.’ The specific shape that such an imaginary has taken has been influenced by the dominance of white, middle class concerns within both the incipient state and education more broadly. This has meant that the moral claims made by the state through history about the ‘good citizen,’ as seen through the institution of education, has largely involved an emphasis on white respectability, middle class comportment, and compliance to the rules of law. Within the wider context of immigration, colonialism and gender roles, women, Aboriginal peoples, and people of non-British ancestry were historically largely excluded from the redemptive associations of ‘good citizenship’ (or any kind of citizenship) until well into the twentieth century. Even as greater rights were negotiated for various marginalized groups, the rhetoric and emphasis of citizenship continued to retain its focus on ‘normalcy’ within a white, middle class, heterosexual frame. Thus the history of citizenship education in Canada reveals, as a trace of the past, the priorities and concerns of this particular nation-state. While both education and the interests of the state are sites of contestation – the acquisition of rights for women and ethnic minorities attest to this – the construction of the ‘good citizen’ throughout educational history has retained to a great degree a focus on being white, middle class, and compliant to the cultural and political norms of the state. (For related critiques of citizenship and the state in Canada and elsewhere, see Brown, 2005; Gilroy, 1991; Lister, 2003; Phillips, 1993; Razack, 2006.)

Citizenship education has taken a specific turn in the last 30 years or so, a turn that is particularly relevant to the young people within this study who attended school in the latter part
of this period. The completion of this hermeneutic ‘detour,’ intended to reveal the operant modes of the cultural manifestation of the contemporary ‘good citizen,’ thus required an analysis of the most recent configurations of citizenship education. I located these within the curriculum documents of the three provinces where I carried out my ethnographic study: British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. Since the 1980s, the liberal welfare state of the post-war period has begun to give way to the neoliberal state of social service retrenchment and economic globalization. In its wake has come a renewed interest in ensuring that young people take up appropriate citizenship virtues, and this has resulted in a renewed emphasis on citizenship education across the country. By assessing the claims being made about citizenship within these three curricular documents, I argue that the ‘good citizen’ of the 21st century has been in part shaped by the new modes of consumer citizenship which Rose (1999) has characterized as a form of neoliberal subjectivity: self-regulating, self-perfecting, and individualized.

Although more difficult to identify within the curricular documents, it remains my assertion that the history of moral claims about the ‘good citizen’ are connected to the contemporary cultural sphere and its manifestation of the ‘good citizen.’ The ‘present’ that shapes the social and cultural worlds through which the participants of this project pass continues to draw upon older histories and ideologies, including class- and ‘race’-bound notions of the proper moral subject, a liberal focus on the rugged, rights-bearing, property-owning individual, and a continued emphasis on obedience and conformity over dissidence and public debate. Each of these elements, while occasionally contradicting one another, are also manifested in some of the varied moral claims made by young activists today, as they attempt to navigate the contemporary context of the Canadian nation-state. It can also be found within the wider cultural sphere of representations of citizenship, such as the media images documented within the next
chapter. It is my argument that these qualities have become aspects of the governance of contemporary subjects, circulating as cultural claims about the ‘good and moral citizen,’ founded upon a long history of similar state-sanctioned propositions. As such, they cannot help but have an impact on youth activist subcultures, navigating as they are the nexus between citizenship and dissent, state participation and state rejection, and all the accompanying pressures and expectations that settle on the shoulders of young contemporary subjects within the current milieu. It is to this complex context, and the stories of the young people living within it, that I now turn.
In the previous chapter, I traced some of the claims which have been made about the ‘good citizen,’ particularly since the inception of broad-based public education up to and including the contemporary resurgence of citizenship education curricula in Canada. My primary argument was that the cultural space of the ‘good citizen’ has long been influenced by classed, raced, and gendered ideals; I also noted that in more recent years the ‘good citizen’ has been framed by a particular set of assumptions that various theorists have linked to the ascendancy of neoliberalism – that is, the good citizen must be self-regulating, self-perfecting, and reflexive, as captured by the emphasis on ‘responsible and informed citizenship.’ While each of these influences are neither singular nor without contestation, my aim within the preceding chapter was to paint a picture of some of the relevant features of the historical and contemporary cultural space through which Canadian young activists must navigate and recontextualize their own practices.

This now well-established picture tells us little about how young people actually experience these cultural forces as they navigate the contemporary political and social order. Nor does it provide much insight into the wider cultural sphere and its associated messages about the ‘good citizen,’ a sphere which is of course much wider than education. This chapter attempts to address these issues at least in part, by turning to the ethnographic data collected over my year of field work in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. In doing so, I seek to respond to aspects of the first and second research questions posed in Chapter 1: “What might be some of the cultural,

32 A version of this chapter has been submitted to The Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies, special issue theme “What’s the matter? Cultural studies and the question of urgency.” Kennelly, J. Global citizen/deviant activist: the cultural role of the state in youth activism.
symbolic and subcultural elements of contemporary Canadian youth activism at the turn of the 21st century?” and “What part might the concept of the idealized ‘good citizen’ play in configuring the cultural processes and modes of operation within contemporary youth activist subcultures?”

The chapter is divided into three sub-sections. The first section outlines in greater detail the theoretical conception of ‘culture’ that I bring to this chapter, and its relationship to the state, young people, and schooling. The second turns to ethnographic data documenting young activists’ experiences of schooling and citizenship education, unpacking some further aspects associated with the cultural notion of the contemporary ‘good citizen’ and its relationship to activism. The third emphasizes the wider cultural realm, specifically media images and policing, drawing on ethnographic data in order to assess the impacts on young activists of influences beyond schooling and how these are linked to the cultural idea of the ‘good citizen.’

5.1 This thing we call ‘culture’

Culture, as argued by Bourdieu (1997; 2001), Williams (1977; 1989), Hall (1996 (1980)), Skeggs (2004) and others, is like the air we breathe – its presence is taken for granted and thus is generally not noticed, something we simply live with and through, usually without thinking about it. The ways in which culture shapes our experiences of the world is thus difficult to explain; the ways in which culture shapes our experiences of the nation-state is particularly elusive. The conceptual frame used within this chapter draws heavily upon Raymond Williams’ (1989) notion of culture, as something that is ‘ordinary,’ every day, and experienced by everyone. Such a view of culture is commonly held amongst those cultural studies theorists trained within or influenced by the Birmingham School for Contemporary Cultural Studies.
Stuart Hall (1996) nicely sums up this view: “By culture, here, I mean the actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society. I also mean the contradictory forms of ‘common sense’ which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life” (p. 439). As noted in Chapter 2, culture is understood to exist in intimate, although not always identifiable, relation to the nation-state. Following the work of Foucault, Althusser, and Bourdieu, culture is seen not as an independent entity evolving in some separate sphere of its own, but as dialectically linked to the priorities and preoccupations of the state within which it exists.

I re-trace these connections here in order to emphasize the complex web of interactions that make up young people’s experiences of, and within, the nation-state, which is neither straight-forward nor predictable. These relations, however, do follow particular patterns – always with exceptions, never immutable, but with patterns nonetheless. It is my concern here to trace these patterns, drawing links between what I have witnessed and been told by participants with a larger theoretical conception of the role of the state and culture in relation to the every day. My ultimate aim is not to indict the young people with whom I carried out this research, somehow laying the blame on their shoulders for ‘capitulating’ to state and cultural stories about the raced, classed, gendered and liberal/neoliberal self, but rather to demonstrate the ways in which we are all susceptible to, and regulated by, the powerful claims about belonging and citizenship to which we are subjected through a wide array of cultural formations. I trace these connections between culture, ‘race’, class, nation and activism as one way of providing some critical space, some conceptual distance, between the fraught and necessary practices of activism and the lived experiences of young people who become so engaged with the concept of political action.33

33 My own emotional journey through this research may be relevant here, as I found my relation to activism shifting as I carried out this project. Always involved with activist groups in Vancouver, my research in Toronto and
One of the key concepts through which I understand young people as experiencing the broader cultural sphere is Raymond Williams’ (1977) notion of *structures of feeling*. As discussed in Chapter 2, this concept allows us to better understand how young activists encounter the state and the broader cultural sphere through emotional experiences and anxieties -- things that appear as personal dramas but which are not that (Bourdieu, 1999) – that shape their capacity to participate within the public realm. That is, they experience the norms reinforced by the state and the cultural sphere bodily and emotionally, and must continually navigate this cultural realm in order to maintain the identity of ‘activist.’ Williams’ concept provides one way to situate the expressed emotions of young activists as emerging not from within the bodies of individualized subjects separated from their social context (for example, as psychological), but as a window into the larger structures that they encounter and navigate on a daily basis (see also Dillabough, Kennelly, and Wang, 2008). The compromises and negations that young activists must engage in can be accompanied by a ‘psychic cost’ (see Lucey and Reay, 2002) that takes its toll in the form of self-doubt and anxiety (Dillabough, Kennelly, and Wang, 2008). These emotional responses, taken together, form part of the analysis below of how young people encounter and navigate the claims made within the broader cultural sphere about activism and the requirements of the contemporary ‘good citizen.’

Montreal led me to further engagement with a variety of activist projects across the country, including the development of a facilitation manual on Canadian ‘security’ measures and carrying out research on housing and homelessness policy for an activist organization in Toronto. If anything, my own developing analysis of the complicity of the nation-state in constructing the ‘good (compliant) citizen,’ and my insights about the classed and racialized nature of activism within this context, permitted me to deepen my involvement. For example, I was more able to discern feelings of guilt and responsibility as remnants of Canadian liberalism versus the urge to participate in activist projects in order to create much-needed change. I was also more able to identify the forms of class harm I had previously encountered, and encountered again; in so identifying them, I was able to distance myself from the emotional response of ‘not belonging’ and recognize the ways in which class (in my case) played out in interactions with other activists. I also gained new insights into the ways in which I perpetuated class and race harms in my interactions with others, and felt more capable of scrutinizing my own behaviours for these hidden intentions.
5.2 Contemporary education and citizenship: youth activist experiences

This segment of the chapter is subdivided into four sections, through which I further explore the often contradictory cultural messages associated with the contemporary notion of the ‘good citizen.’ Keeping in mind the wider cultural pressures to be self-regulating and self-perfecting (as documented within my discourse analysis of citizenship curricula), I will first highlight the apparent confluence between the contemporary ‘good citizen’ and certain forms of activism, discussing the role that this immersion of activism into citizenship plays. Next, I will look at the delimiting factors that prevent ‘good citizenship’ and ‘activism’ from ever fully overlapping, because of Canada’s history of, and ongoing commitment to, the political ideology of liberalism. I then consider the hidden aspects of class and ‘race’ that reside within this quasi-activist liberal version of ‘good citizenship.’ Finally, I consider what these encounters with citizenship have meant for young activists, documenting the associated ‘psychic costs’ (Lucey and Reay, 2002) that emerge and are expressed through participants’ emergent ‘structures of feeling.’

5.2.1 Good activist = good citizen?

In the last chapter, I argued that contemporary citizenship curriculum seems to be overwhelmingly concerned with producing ‘responsible’ citizens. I critiqued this approach as one manifestation of the wider ideological influence of neoliberalism, with its emphasis on self-regulation and self-perfection. However, as noted, the curricular documents I analyzed were also concerned with ‘active citizenship’ (even if ‘active’ was generally moderated by ‘responsible’ and/or ‘informed’). While what exactly it means to be an ‘active citizen’ is left somewhat undefined, certainly some of the examples within the curricular documents included such
elements of activist practice as attending protests or being part of social movements. This was not an overwhelming message, of course: the results of my discourse analysis showed that the Quebec curriculum (Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport, 2004) made no mention of ‘activism,’ ‘activist,’ or ‘protest’; the Ontario curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005) made no mention of ‘activism’ or ‘activist’ although it included two references to ‘protest’ (“Canada’s role in some key Cold War activities from 1945 to 1989 (e.g….cruise missile testing and protests)” (p. 57) and “describe how their own and others’ beliefs and values can be connected to a sense of civic purpose and preferred types of participation (e.g….participation in protest movements, …) (p. 68)). The BC curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005) included eight mentions of ‘activist,’ although seven of these were within the context of one case study (the WTO protests in Seattle). It made six mentions of ‘protest’; three of these were in relation to the case study about the WTO in Seattle. While ‘activism’ makes only a brief cameo appearance within two of the three curricular documents analyzed, it would be incorrect to suggest that the curricula entirely neglect activism as an element of citizenship.

The idea of the ‘good citizen’ within contemporary schooling, if not overwhelmingly activist, is certainly compatible with wider forms of community engagement. For example, both Ontario and BC graduation requirements currently include ‘community work,’ which are often explicitly linked to the development of citizenship attributes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2006). Various participants noted the way in which community involvement had come to be conflated with the idea of good (and successful) citizenship. Nancy (age 20) made the following remark:

Nancy: The school did encourage participation in extracurricular activities, universities required it, or highly recommended that kind of, a portfolio that included community participation and a lot of non-academic criteria like that. So those were, like highly, definitely incentives.
Jackie: Yeah.

Nancy: To get involved and stuff like that. And it was just part of the, you know, the portfolio of a good student is one that even though [one] succeeds academically but [one also succeeds] otherwise. So.

Nancy notes that her community involvement was recognized and encouraged by the school as one manner in which to enhance her chances of getting a good position at a university, and that this, unsurprisingly, acted as an incentive to her own participation. To be a ‘good student’ was to be not only academically successful, but also successfully engaged in projects of ‘good citizenship’ such as benevolent community work.

Although such community work is not necessarily activist in nature, it does function to open up space for activist projects within the criteria for ‘good citizenship’ status. That activism and forms of community work encouraged by contemporary schooling were conflated was noted by participants, often with some trepidation. Rajinder (age 13) makes the following comments:

Rajinder: So but then, and kind of coming back to that whole problematic term [of activist], because it’s a term that’s so kind of friendly now, that oh you know, that it’s a good thing rather than something that would be threatening or dangerous to the state. Like that’s why I know a lot of terms like insurgent or radical have been used by people because those are terms that they don’t like to hear, that have been demonized. And, so yeah. So there’s this whole friendliness of the term [activism].

The conflation of activism with the legitimate ‘good citizen’, and the boundaries that lie between these two concepts, was also abundantly evident to me one day during my field work. I had attended two events that day as part of my ethnographic research, the first a speech by Craig Keilburger, founder of Save the Children, the second a memorial put on by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. While each of these groups and individuals position themselves as being ‘anti-poverty activists,’ their approach to activism, and the response they received from police and the
general public, mark the tensions that remain between the idea of the ‘good citizen’ and the
‘activist.’ I document my experience within the following vignette, drawn from my fieldnotes
dated October 24th, 2006:

The late afternoon sun fell on trees still brilliant with their fall colours, but I could feel
the bite of impending winter in the air as I headed for the Woodhouse Lecture at the University
of Toronto. It was being given by Craig Keilburger, who founded the international anti-poverty
organization Save the Children at age 12. The auditorium was filled with 20-something students
and well-heeled professor types. Keilburger was relaxed and confident; now age 23, he was an
accomplished public speaker. His message was that one individual can make a difference, and he
emphasized the benefits of volunteering, stating that it would make us feel better about ourselves,
giving us the same endorphin high that can be had from a good run. He stated that for about a
third of what we spend on perfume, we could eradicate world poverty. He said that we could
make a difference by buying his sweatshop free t-shirts, which happened to proclaim his logo
and the name of his book, ‘Me to We.’ The audience applauded approvingly. As I left the lecture,
I overheard one young woman, who appeared to be in her early twenties, saying to her friend,
“Wasn’t that inspiring? I don’t want to live a mainstream life.” By this, she presumably meant
that she wanted to have the exciting and fulfilling life described by Keilburger as possible
through individual choice and effort.

Rather than stay and enjoy the generous spread of post-lecture delicacies, I headed for
the subway, knowing that it would take some time to get over to the far west side of the city
where the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) was holding a memorial service for Vasyl,
a former member of the 2003 Pope Squat.34 I knew I had found the service when I saw a small
crowd on the sidewalk outside a boarded up house, surrounded by four police cars, video
cameras, and a line of policemen in bright yellow jackets. Two mounted police officers prodded
their horses back and forth along King Street, also surveilling the small gathering. One of the
speakers told us about Vasyl’s life after he had arrived in Canada as an immigrant from Eastern
Europe, forced to work under the table due to the fact that Immigration Canada wouldn’t give
him legal recognition. She spoke of how he had been injured in these unsafe working conditions,
and how his employer had threatened him if he went to Worker’s Compensation. She spoke of his
contributions to the Pope Squat, of how he had been happy being part of a community, of how he
had been living on the streets before that, and that after the Pope Squat closed, he had been
forced back on the street, as had all of the people who had lived in the Squat. She spoke of how
after his death by suicide, the City of Toronto had refused to pay for his burial. She spoke angrily
of the state and municipal structures that failed him, waving derisively at the police lined up
behind her, and connecting Vasyl’s plight to capitalism and its role in maintaining such brutal
inequality. I shivered as I listened to her, thinking about how difficult it would be to be homeless
on a night like this.

34 The Pope Squat was a four month occupation of an abandoned building in Toronto, organized by the Ontario
Coalition Against Poverty in order to bring attention to the ongoing homelessness crisis in Ontario (Give Us The
Keys, 2006). For a detailed archive of newspaper articles and news releases about the Pope Squat, see
Within this vignette we see, on the one hand, the quintessential contemporary ‘good citizen,’ as exemplified by Craig Kielburger and his organization, Save the Children. Resting on a foundation of consumer choices and activism-as-self-development, Kielburger’s vision aligns neatly with the current curricular emphasis on both community work and ‘responsible citizenship,’ with its associated self-regulating and self-perfecting requirements. On the other hand, there is the OCAP memorial for Vasyl, which challenged the practices of oblivion (Curtis, 1999), or processes of social erasure, increasingly created by a neoliberal and economically stratified state. They did this by memorializing a man who had been marginalized (literally to death) within its structures. For their efforts, they received heavy surveillance by the state through its police presence. Both events were attended by young people concerned about injustices in the world, but each had very different messages about what it means to take action to create positive social change, and what this means for one’s relation to the Canadian state. The above vignette captures, I believe, much of the tension experienced by young activists between being a ‘good citizen’ (who engages in worthwhile community projects that can resemble activism) and being a ‘bad activist’ (who steps beyond the bounds of good citizenship to challenge state claims to legitimacy).

Participants’ experiences of the conflation of community work with activism, alongside the vignette from my field notes, reinforce the message apparent in the divergent representations of activists in the first chapter of this thesis (the Jane magazine versus the cover of the Globe and Mail). I am suggesting that these examples highlight the manner in which ‘good citizenship’ has

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35 The links between Kielburger’s approach and the new civics curricula has been recognized by policy-makers as well. During the period of my field work, Kielburger was part of a provincial symposium entitled Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12, held on October 15th and 16th, 2006. He spoke alongside the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, promoting ‘character education’ as a new component of the Ontario civics curriculum. The symposium concluded with McGuinty pledging $2 million to develop this curriculum (see Media release …, 2006). Character education is one of the primary approaches that has been taken in the development of new civics curricula across Western liberal democracies (see for example Davies, Gorard, & McGuinn, 2005).
come to incorporate certain, although by no means all, aspects of activist practice. While on the one hand appearing to legitimate certain forms of activist practice, and thus perhaps even widening their scope and reach, the gradual conflation of ‘good citizenship’ with certain kinds of activism also functions to undermine the very role of activism, which has always been to challenge the state. Not surprisingly, state interests are generally not aligned with supporting and maintaining practices that challenge them. Arguably, then, the gradual conflation of activism with good citizenship may be one means by which activism is regulated, becoming fundamentally less dangerous in its capacity to intervene into state practices (see also Brown, 2005). It also serves to conceal the individualizing influences of liberalism and neoliberalism, as well as the classed and raced elements of who is able to take up the idea of the ‘good citizen.’ These aspects are further explored below.

5.2.2 Liberalism

Despite the small presence within contemporary citizenship education of activist (or community) organizing as one way in which to enact one’s citizenship, many of the young people within my study experienced schooling for citizenship as much more tightly linked to traditional forms of liberalism, including an emphasis on state structures of government, and one’s limited role within the state as a voter. The assessment offered by Caleb (age 20), reflecting on the Ontario curriculum, is typical of many respondents.36

Caleb: We have a civics class, it’s half a year in grade 10 and it’s totally useless. …. They introduced two mandatory half-year courses. One is civics and one was career studies. … But this, I mean the civics class. It goes over Canadian government and citizenship and things like that. … I think the idea was the government wanted them to be educated before they could vote. It was also really

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36 Participants’ general disdain for citizenship education was one of the most consistent results of my interviews, so much so that I began to feel embarrassed when I asked the question about ‘experiences of citizenship education’ (see Appendix for semi-structured interview protocol).
boring. It was a boring class. So I mean, there was that. It wasn’t very inspirational. And it wasn’t, it wasn’t about being part of something or you know working. It didn’t have any sort of focus on you know, so you’ve now learned about the Canadian government. You can get out there and do your thing. It was more about this is the Canadian government, this is the, you know, powerful people. These are our prime ministers. Here, take the test. [chuckles]

As Caleb references with his final dry comment (“Here, take the test”), a final standardized exam remains central. Such tests have been identified by some scholars (see for example Hursh, 2005) as a problematic aspect of neoliberal regimes of schooling; their presence highlight how the civics courses are structured by other elements of broader neoliberal ideology. Beyond the standardized exam that elicits Caleb’s ironic chuckle, his comments highlight the civics curriculum’s focus on the structures of liberal democratic government over and above “being part of something,” which he experiences as both “boring” and not particularly “inspirational.”

In a different province (BC) and in a slightly earlier time period (prior to the implementation of the newest civics curricula), Andrew (age 28) also found schooling to be highly irrelevant to his development as an activist:

Jackie: Do you have any memories of receiving education on citizenship or democracy in school?

Andrew: Hmm. Not. No. [laughter] It’s actually, not essentially. You know, you have the vague memories of the boring social studies class. You learn you have this political system. There might have been like a mock election in there, which is mildly interesting. But not really because I remember, this is grade eleven or something. They didn’t let you, you were given a party and then you had to say why this party was the best. But I was pretty sure that, you know, my family was NDP and they made the most sense to me. That’s who I cheered for in the elections, so. That’s who I wanted to be. Or even Green Party. I think I was already thinking Green Party would be a good, but that wasn’t allowed, so I remember being irritated by that. No, they never, I don’t remember anything in terms of citizenship as I think of it now. It’s just sort of citizens are people who live in Canada for long enough and you get a thing and yeah. Yeah. Nothing memorable anyway.
Similarly, from Conrad:

Jackie: Do you remember learning about democracy and citizenship in school? What do you remember of that?

Conrad: Yeah, I remember learning about it very generally in high school, even in elementary school, we’d have, so it would depend on the teacher, when they had local elections, I remember we would do things like, you know, pretend you’re one of those people in the party, and I used to love debating and talking and whatever. And it was just like that whole Iraq war thing, right? So there was a discussion of politics, and it depended on the teacher, and it depended how strong the issues were, and – we talked about the importance of voting, but, in any meaningful way, like, I don’t, can’t recall it right? So from these elementary school, all the debates and things, um, maybe that’s grade four or five, I don’t remember, I can’t recollect any sort of political stuff about democracy, about that until my social studies 11, and history 12 classes, where it’s talked about in a roundabout way, right? You’re just dealing with like dates, and events and you’re realizing, oh yeah, these people in world war 1 and world war 2, they fought for democracy, yeah, that’s how you learn about democracy, right? Not really what it means to be a voting citizen and any of that stuff.

The forms of citizenship on offer through schooling, as experienced by Caleb, Andrew, Connor and others, were limited to structures of government, debating, elections, and the ‘powerful people’ in Canada. Such a stripped down version of citizenship, whereby the individual is able to participate within the state only through his or her relationship to a party or as a voter (and only to some political parties, as experienced by Andrew), is not surprising in a state such as Canada with its own deeply embedded history of liberal democracy. Similar to the experiences of those cited above, most participants found citizenship education to be highly irrelevant to their own ideas of democracy and citizenship, or to their activist development. They experienced the curricula -- as a structure of feeling – through ‘boredom,’ emptiness, or education as ‘meaningless.’ Farah (age 27) reflects on the limitations of the predominance of liberal forms of democracy, and her frustrations with its hegemony:

Farah: More and more so lately I think democracy is a really stupid thing. I think it’s mythical. It’s like as a - a political objective – like the fact that we’re selling democracy and the rest of the world -- not like when we’re shoving it down
people’s throats but when people are seriously dying for the right to vote and stuff, I - I just can’t believe the way we’ve sold our model of democracy as being something really, really engaged and progressive because it pretty much ends debate – our model of it, at least you know? Um the idea [that] a system of people voting could make anything like – I don't know, again it’s arrogant to tell people living under a serious, brutal military style dictatorship that the right to vote is over-rated, but -

Jackie: Right.

Farah: I mean what’s worse? Living with a couple of -- the option between two or three CEOs you know? Who -- and really not having a say. Like that very option or structure making people so apathetic that – yeah. I don't know what the statistics are right now about the poor underclass in Canada but I think somehow we think everyone has an iPod or something you know and I don’t really think everyone does –I think most people don’t. And I think there’s a giant poor population that thinks that there’s not as many of them as they think. Because democracy in and - and - and images of [former Prime Minister] Paul Martin and stuff make you think that there’s a general middle class vibe in the country or something. I know the differences are a lot more stark in the [United] States but I wonder how different it is.

Jackie: Yeah. Yeah.

Farah: I just think it’s paralyzing and it makes people not do anything.

Farah’s analysis of Canadian democracy provides a different genesis for the ‘apathy’ and lack of involvement that has served as the rationale for developing new civics curricula. Rather than seeing the problem as lying primarily within the ‘citizens’ themselves, she sees the very structures of democracy within Canada to be limited such that people ultimately find participation within it to be meaningless, largely due to ever-increasing degrees of class stratification and inequality. Whether her analysis is correct or not, it certainly stands in sharp contrast to the forms of civic engagement made available through civics classes, as reflected upon above by the participants. These contrasts are meaningful, I believe, in further highlighting the ways in which civics curricula are associated with specific forms of democratic participation which are by no means the only possibility. That is, civics curricula carry the burdens of their
own ideological undercurrents, highly influenced by histories of liberalism and associated ideas about appropriate limits to citizen participation within the state. As Westheimer and Kahne (2003) note, “the narrow and often ideologically conservative conception of citizenship embedded in many current efforts at teaching for democracy reflects neither arbitrary choices nor pedagogical limitations but rather political choices with political consequences” (p. 1).

5.2.3 Class and ‘race’

In the previous chapter, I gave an example from the BC Civics 11 curriculum that included a range of people across social markers as ‘model citizens.’ This appeared to stand in contrast to previous histories of citizenship education, in which class- and ‘race’-based exclusions were far more apparent. The inclusion of such ‘role models’ may be an important start, but according to the young people in this study it has not meant that the concept of citizenship within education and the wider cultural sphere is equally accessible to all. Thus, in addition to compliance with liberal democracy’s emphasis on electoral individualism, the story of the ‘good citizen’ continues to be deeply classed, racialized, and gendered.37

37 I leave ‘gendered’ in here although the data I collected did not reveal the gendered aspects of citizenship as clearly as the classed and racialized aspects. Nonetheless, gender continues to be a salient marker in the construction of the ‘good citizen,’ in delimiting the specific ways in which males and females might take up particular forms of ‘good citizenship.’ It is also gendered in the way that schooling, as part of a broader cultural phenomenon, continues to emphasize the gender binary, such that those who fall between ‘male’ and ‘female’ – transgendered individuals, for example – find themselves entirely outside of the dialogue about the ‘good citizen.’ Matthew, a transsexual man (female-to-male), in reflecting on his views of citizenship and democracy in Canada, made the following comment: Matthew: … So I don’t think that I, I think that I feel pretty removed from it. Also I don’t have job protection. As a transsexual I don’t feel valued as a citizen. I don’t have equal access to healthcare. So I don’t think, I don’t think I feel as entitled as other people do around it. And I don’t think I feel a sense of pride about it that other people do either.

Jackie: Right. Pride about Canada?

Matthew: Yeah. [chuckles] Or being a Canadian citizen
Stuart reflects on his own experiences of the racialized exclusions he encountered through schooling:

Jackie: do you have any memories of being educated specifically for citizenship or democracy?

Stuart: Mm-hm, I think in social studies, this message became very obvious to me, how society at large in Canada is set up. I got a distinct impression that there was some false kind of facts fed to us.

Jackie: Like what?

Stuart: Well I just got the impression through these text books that Canada is this great thing, it’s like you know, the be all, end all panacea, it will solve all your societal problems, and there was all these different instances of like injustice, where there’d be the Chinese Head Tax, or every other mile there’s a dead Chinaman, having the Sikhs and Punjabs sent back to India, all these, the Japanese internment, all these different racially based injustices. It became really obvious to me, they’re not giving us the straight facts, this isn’t the truth, this is like a euphemized version of his-story.

Jackie: Did you learn about things like the Chinese Head Tax and you know –

Stuart: through my own research.

Jackie: So not in school.

Stuart: Right, not in school. We were, like, I became aware of it, but I had to learn of it like through my own research.

Given that Stuart (age 23) graduated from high school in the 21st century, it is interesting to note his observations about the continuity between the exclusions of the past (as documented within Chapter 4) and the continued absence of Canada’s racist legacy from school curriculum. Indeed, as a member of a First Nations band, Stuart also made some powerful indictments about his experiences within mainstream schooling; for example, of being ‘streamed’ into classes with lower academic expectations, and being in a class about First Nations culture that focused on what he described derisively as “an arts and crafts kind of class, like making drums, rattles, all
these little like trinkets.” Such ongoing discrimination against Aboriginal peoples and devaluing of Aboriginal cultures is well documented within educational literature (see, for example, Frideres, 1978; Persson, 1986), and highlights the relevance of historical injustices to the lived experiences of young people within schools today. His experiences also highlight the ways in which histories of racism and colonialism continue to have a material impact on the realities of student’s lives today within Canadian schools, as revealed in part through the detour of the last chapter.

The powerful history of white dominance within the Canadian cultural sphere retains its influence in the experiences of visible minority students passing through the school system, as they attempt to create a sense of identity and belonging for themselves within the category of ‘citizen.’ Even with the inclusion of a (small) diversity of role models within contemporary citizenship curricula, as noted in Chapter 4, young people have absorbed through the cultural air that the ‘good (real) citizen’ in Canada is white. Those who cannot lay claim to this form of ‘normalcy’ are forced to reconcile their own bodily realities with what they have learned about Canada’s apparently inclusive ‘citizenship.’ As Nancy (age 20), whose family came to Canada from Eritrea, notes, “society will never view me as Canadian.” Other participants made similar remarks:

Sanna: But I guess more than anything I’d have to say that I’m Canadian. But there is that, so now becoming more conscious, I’ve noticed that disparity between, like I can’t just say I’m Canadian, but a white person could be like ‘well, I’m Canadian,’” and you don’t have to be like “no, you’re not, because you’re not Aboriginal so you’re definitely not Canadian.” Um, and one of the terms that we use in my [university] classes that I think is such a solid term is the notion of being forever hyphenated, and always needing that ‘Indo-Canadian’, you know, uh, ‘Kenyan-Canadian’ whatever, needing that hyphen to be legitimized. So I think my connection to citizenship right now is one of increasing uncomfortability (age 19).
Jonathon: It’s weird, I oscillate between feeling very Canadian and very un-Canadian at times. I feel in one way is I’ve tried to like reject my Canadian-ness because I’m trying to explore who I am as a Korean person. But at the same time, like I don’t speak the language. I don’t live in Korea. I’m not very Korean, but I wish I was (age 25).

Fouzia: Like if people ask me what I am I say I’m Pakistani-Canadian. But I just, it doesn’t, like that’s a very surfacy, almost like ‘how are you, I’m fine’ type of answer. You know? I think my, the sticky thing with citizenship and with Canada is everything is really glossed over. Like, I have a huge bone of contention within the multiculturalism policy and looking at the way Canada manipulates its borders based on what type of people they require within our society. Like, the ability to control and maneuver our demographic and the way that we need more skilled workers in the technology area of society, therefore we’ll open the gates to people from Bangladesh or India who know IT stuff. Or like, you know, before I used to be really fine with like considering yourself as Canadian and being almost proud and like I think it’s all in context in relation to other things. Like in relation to America? I’m glad I’m in Canada. In relation to the rest of the world? Like, I don’t know. But I’m just in Canada. Do I identify as a Canadian? Uh, I don’t know. Like I don’t really know. I think like, I don’t know if I’m answering this correctly [laughs] (age 24).

These assertions of ambivalence about a Canadian identity stood in sharp contrast to the ease with which white participants could own their Canadian citizenship, even if they felt angry or embarrassed by the historical and current actions of Canada as a nation-state. The need that young people from racialized groups felt to ‘hyphenate’ themselves spoke to deeper emotions – that could be understood through Williams’ notion of structures of feeling – of belonging, or of exclusion. It also highlights the deeply symbolic ways in which national imaginaries, which are fundamentally contingent upon the history of citizenship in Canada, regulate how one thinks about oneself in the context of the state.

Whether or not one feels that one ‘belongs’ to Canada is constituted in large part by the ways in which other people react to one’s purported place in the nation. That is, no matter how much one might feel a sense of ‘belonging’ within Canada, if one does not match the cultural
imaginary of the proper citizen, then one will continually be reminded that one does not, in fact, belong:

Fouzia: So maybe to me, I think, citizenship equates to like actual acceptance or ground-rooted belonging within where you’re from or where you live. And I’ve never had that sense of complete belonging. Ever. Within my experiences, within my childhood, within anything that I’ve done. Like, I can tell you right from my childhood, like, you know, we were Muslim. We were living in [a] predominantly white neighbourhood. Things like when Eid would come around, it’s an Islamic festival, like Islamic day, Mum would be really wanting to have us energized over this, over this cultural day. So she would put mhendi on our hands. Like, henna. So I remember the next day I went to school and I had henna on my hands and the teacher asked a question. I put up my hand and for the rest of the, that morning, till the afternoon, I was being taunted about having this disease growing on my hands. And like the principal found me in the washroom bawling my eyes out trying to scrub the henna off my hands (age 24).

Farah: It just really helped me connect with the – an experience and an identity as someone who definitely grew up thinking I was an immigrant. You know, like knowing I was an immigrant. And having a father with a weird accent and getting called nigger at elementary school and being told to go back to where I come from, from neighbours and having a weird name and having different birth certificates and all this kind of stuff. You know that are markers in - in you feeling different (age 27).

These every day encounters with racism within the cultural field of schooling make up the unofficial curriculum that young people incorporate into their understandings of themselves and their role within the nation-state. They are remarkable for their continuity with histories of ‘race’-based exclusions, as documented in the previous chapter. Remarkable also are the ways in which such experiences engender a specific structure of feeling -- in this case, of feeling excluded, taunted and different – and what this means for young people’s material relationship to the concept of citizenship. No matter how much they might feel loyalty to the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 2006) of the Canadian nation – and many participants remarked that they began schooling with just such a feeling of patriotism – their experiences within the educational system and the broader cultural sphere have left them ambivalent and uncertain, and
with a sense that they do not quite belong ‘here’ but neither do they belong anywhere else. From within a liberal democratic state, where one’s belonging to the state is the basis for legitimation upon which one claims the rights of citizenship (i.e. the right to have rights, see Arendt, 1998; Benhabib, 2004), the impact of racism within Canadian schools can act to further limit the participation of those from racialized communities within even the narrow range of options offered through schooling as acts of citizenship.

Beyond exclusions based on ‘race’ – or the perception of racialized difference – the forms of citizenship on offer through schooling are also implicated in reinforcing class differences. In many ways, these exclusions were harder to identify, and generally were not labelled as such by participants themselves. The hidden role played by class (as a form of class denial) further amplifies the kinds of injuries encountered, by remaining invisible and thus harder to both recognize and analyze. The specific role of class in the contemporary milieu is also part of the key to the question of who can be an ‘active citizen’ as exemplified within citizenship curricula and the wider cultural sphere. As Karen (age 27) so eloquently explains in the excerpt below, citizenship, as a function of active participation within a democratic public sphere, is simply not available to the majority of people in Canadian society or schooling, embedded as each is within consumerist codes of acquisition and the struggle for affluence in times of state retrenchment:

Karen: I was never instilled with [democracy and citizenship] as a value. … *Like, it was just always kind of latent which is kind of problematic because everything else is so in your face*. Like, if that’s latent and you’re being told all the time to buy this to be better or to, you know. Really I think the pressure of our generation was, like, you know, our parents were really worried that we’re not going to have as much money as them. *And, and so they’re like, just concentrate on yourself*. Do good work after that. *But just, you know, get yourself on your feet*. And when that’s the predominant message, like, where is any of this caring stuff going to come from? You know. I only, *kids who did caring stuff, kids who were involved in high school were kids trying to pad their resume*. That’s what it was seen as
and so it’s kind of, that’s a really cynical position to come from. (italics my emphasis).

The hidden text within this excerpt is the importance of class concerns in the production of the ‘good citizen.’ Karen comes from a working class/working poor background; when she describes her parents as being concerned that she make more money than them, she is describing a reality that belongs, in this case, to a working class family struggling to survive in the face of neoliberal retrenchment. When she speaks of “kids trying to pad their resume,” she is obliquely referencing the class divisions that continue to persist in education’s production of the ‘active citizen,’ (through, for example, community projects) whereby those with middle class aspirations and habitus learn early how to play the game of the ‘good citizen’ in order to make themselves and their CVs more marketable in the ‘new global economy.’

The opportunity to participate as an ‘active citizen’ through community engagement projects, previously described as an increasingly desirable aspect of ‘good citizenship,’ cannot be uncoupled from young people’s experiences of class and economic stratification in schools. Caleb (age 20), for example, spent most of his secondary education in a wealthy urban public high school. He then switched in his last year to another urban high school that was designated a “technical” school, which catered to a student population with a lower socio-economic status. He marvelled at the differences between the two schools in terms of both their academic expectations and their emphasis on community involvement:

   Caleb: And so I spent a couple of months at Downtown Tech School, which was completely different. And I actually needed to get some courses done that I

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[38] At another point within the interview, Karen shares her mother’s struggle to care for her brother, who was dying of cancer. Her mother left her job in order to nurse him, and, in the face of cuts to pharmaceutical supports and the health care system during the reign of Mike Harris’s Conservatives within Ontario, was unable to afford the expensive drugs that would have eased his pain during this difficult period. Given such a context, the desire of Karen’s parents that she “concentrate on [her]self” takes on heightened meaning and material relevance within a neoliberal era.
wanted to take before I left high school and I chose Downtown Tech just because I knew it was a different atmosphere and I was really curious what it would be like. … [So] I went from Uptown Academic to Downtown Tech and I became a visible minority at the school. So that was, that was a difference.

Jackie: Who were the majority?

Caleb: Ah. Everyone else. No one, no one was really the majority but I mean.

Jackie: People of colour?

Caleb: Yeah. Yeah. You know, everyone who I mostly didn’t see at Uptown Academic. Ah. And you know the differences in everything in that school were huge. I mean, you know they, one of the things that I got from just going there for four or five months was that supposedly the public education system is, you know, an equal playing field between all schools, which is, I mean, between the two schools that I attended, is total bullshit. Just, like the kids at Downtown Tech are not stupid. They’re smart guys. But the course load and the material and everything that they take that is the same is geared towards less critical thinking, less work, less difficulty, which just sets them up for not being able to work at the same level as people from Uptown Academic. Which outraged me, it really pissed me off. And at a community level it’s the same thing. There’s very little of it. There’s no kind of organizing principle, there’s no.

Jackie: Mmm. As in within the school? In the way Uptown Academic had you mean?

Caleb: Yeah.

Jackie: And building a school community that’s supportive and, right.

Caleb: Yeah. So I mean if students were interested in activism it would be that much harder for them to get organized. Or to find out about things. At least at the high school level. Like I’m sure once they’re beyond that they’re in, you know, at [university] and they probably catch up pretty quickly. But they miss out on those high school years of being able to get involved.

Caleb’s optimism about his classmates’ future involvement through university may be somewhat misplaced, given that their chances of attending university from an inner city technical school were likely substantially less than that of his classmates from Uptown Academy. Caleb’s experiences within the two schools highlights the division that exists between lower-resourced
‘technical’ schools that historically serve working class communities versus middle class
‘academic’ schools that can afford to focus on community involvement as an aspect of ‘good
citizenship.’

Jonathon (age 25) attended an exclusive all-boys private school where, in his words “they
basically train you to be masters of the universe.” He described the opportunities that were
available to him because of his attendance there:

Jonathon: But I think that’s essentially one of the problems, right? Is you know
we had access to this really great education, but that’s because, I mean, it cost
fifteen to twenty thousand dollars a year. So we had opportunities. I mentioned
that I was able to work on the yearbook and, and you know, manage the theatre
and all of this. And, yeah, I mean I had so many opportunities in high school. In,
when I was in grade nine I was on the rowing team and I was responsible for, you
know, a $30,000 racing hull and, you know, a crew of eight people. Right? Like
that, I think that’s had a huge impact on sort of why I do what I do or where I am
where I am. I had those opportunities.

Again, we see the elision of elite or higher-resourced schooling with opportunities for, if not
activism, then certainly community engagement, as well as the development of skills and
knowledge that could be of use within activist frames.

What young people’s experiences highlight is that attainment of the skills of ‘good
citizenship’ – which were often identified by participants as one of their own stepping stones into
activism -- is often inextricably linked to one’s location in a class-stratified society. Although it
is important not to elide these kinds of community projects with activist engagement (see also
Lousely, 1999), the promotion and development of skills that are transferable to activism were
often experienced by participants as linked to schools in middle and upper class neighbourhoods.
This accounts, in some part, for how class location has come to be implicated in who is able to
develop the complex skills necessary to ‘belong’ within activist circles (more on this in Chapter 6).
It also points to the hidden elements of class that remain within the contemporary construction of the ‘good citizen.’ Again, showing remarkable continuity with the exclusions of the past, the increasing emphasis on particular kinds of community involvement (generally not activist) means that citizenship comes to have classed connotations. Similar to ‘race’-based exclusions, this functions as a form of governance by generating a set of feelings – that one is not good enough or not skilled enough to do community work and thus fulfill one’s citizenship obligations, for example – that can cause some young people to ‘opt out’ of engaging in this manner.

Bourdieu’s concepts of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2006 (1977); Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and his articulation of the relationship between subjective expectations and objective chances (Bourdieu, 1997) can help to explain how this happens. The former refers to how seemingly benign symbols – for example, that of the ‘good citizen’ engaged in community work – can come to represent the symbolic hierarchies that configure our society, not explicitly but implicitly marking who has attained the forms of cultural capital that make it possible to perform the task of citizenship at this complex level. This concept is related to the latter (the relation between subjective expectations and objective chances), which attests to the remarkable consistency with which people will aspire only to the degree that the social structures permit – that is, they seem to be ‘choosing’ particular goals, but these goals are aligned with those generally attributed to their class.39 By linking something as seemingly benign and beneficial as

39 From An invitation to reflexive sociology: “Symbolic violence, to put it as tersely and simply as possible, is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity... This is why the analysis of the doxic acceptance of the world, due to the immediate agreement of objective structures and cognitive structures, is the true foundation of a realistic theory of domination and politics. Of all forms of “hidden persuasion”, the most implacable is the one exerted, quite simply, by the order of things” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, pp 167-168. Italics in original). From Pascalian meditations: ‘[O]ne has to take account of the fact that the automatic effects of the conditionings imposed by the conditions of existence are added to by the directly educative interventions of the family, the peer group and the agents of the educational system (assessments, advice, injunctions, recommendations), which expressly aim to favour the adjustment of aspirations to objective chances, needs to
‘community projects’ to ‘good citizenship,’ contemporary education functions to reinforce the
symbolic domination of the middle classes who are easily able to participate in such projects as
well as reconstituting the objective positioning of young people who seem to ‘opt out’ of such
acts of ‘good citizenship’ (see also Zizek, 2005, for a discussion of the role of ‘choice’ within
humanitarianism).

5.2.4 Structures of feeling

One response to citizenship education, documented above, was to experience it, as a
structure of feeling, as ‘boring’ or ‘irrelevant.’ Another common feeling, perhaps not surprising
in light of the difficulties described above, was one of ‘repulsion’ towards schooling in general.
This was particularly expressed by participants when I asked them about schooling’s influence
on their activism:

Jackie: Did schooling play any role in developing your activist self?

Ruby: Well, in the sense that I had a very clear sense of what patriarchy was, and
what, and like I think, I don’t think, I mean I wasn’t oppressed in my family
situation, it was in my schooling situation where that really came up. Racially,
and sexism, the whole gamut of like, you know, like class was a huge issue in
private school. That’s what, I feel like even now that’s what I’m still trying to
undo. That’s why I work with youth, it’s because I’m in this school system that’s
constantly deactivating them, you know? (age 27)

From a different city, with a different gender and ethnicity, Daniel (age 21) responded in a very
similar way:

Jackie: So schooling didn’t really play much of a role in developing your political
self?

By
discouraging aspirations oriented to unattainable goals, which are thereby defined as illegitimate pretensions, these
calls to order tend to underline or anticipate the sanctions of necessity and to orientate aspirations towards more
realistic goals, more compatible with the chances inscribed in the position occupied” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 217).
Daniel: Well, in a negative sense, in making me see what I didn’t like, you know? … And certainly you know, there’s no way that it didn’t play a huge role in my life considering the amount of time I spent there, but it’s not a question of, it’s more a question of being, realizing what I don’t like and what I do.

Similarly, from Karen (age 27):

Jackie: Did schooling play any role in developing your activist self?

Karen: Well only in the sense that like from a negative perspective. [laughs] Like, just you know, like school was such a negative experience and you see it happening to other people all around you and. Just knowing that that’s not how things should go on. … I mean also because like at the time, I mean I’m sure this is still true in a lot of places, like it was a really homophobic place. Really homophobic place and just really being disgusted by that. Because we’re not like everyone else, it was directed at my friends, and myself. So it’s kind of like one of the things that I think that sparks, like either you become just so like internalized negative and stuff like that and you don’t do anything with it or you do something with it. So I think that, only in the way that negative experiences can help you like grow something else.

These negative evaluations of schooling, as a structure of feeling, highlight the ongoing relevance of the history of exclusions traced out in the last chapter. Participant accounts of sexism, racism, and homophobia within schools suggest that although efforts have been made to create more inclusive curriculum, some students continue to experience schools as sites of deep inequality. This ‘hidden curriculum’ within schooling belies the professed goals of civics curricula to emphasize equality for all. It further highlights the distance that remains between the curricular attempts to develop ‘active citizens’ who are working to improve social conditions in society at large and the experiences of the very young people who have taken those as their central goals.

Returning to the theoretical issue of governance, we can see from the experiences documented here that participants received a very clear message about the type of citizen they ought to be from the educational system. Specifically, this component of the cultural sphere (i.e. schooling) demonstrated for them that their role as citizens was limited to engagement with the
state as a voter or, at most, as either a member of a political party or as someone involved in worthwhile community projects that do not challenge the state. Above all, they learned that they are to engage with the state only as individuals, with their own individual burdens of guilt and responsibility (more on this in the next chapter). Further, they encountered a microcosm of the wider injustices within society, as apparent in acts of racism, and the class-based exclusions associated with certain forms of ‘good citizenship.’ Their encounters with educational attempts to imbue them with civic virtues generated for them feelings of boredom or, in the context of the injustices they witnessed at school, repulsion. These ‘structures of feeling’ functioned, for this particular group of young people, as a partial motivation to become engaged in activism beyond the realm of schooling. However, not all students have such opportunities, as will be discussed further in the chapters to come. That the forms of citizenship available through schooling are limited, or might indeed be seen as entrenched in the history of social conflicts, is perfectly consistent with the findings of multiple theorists about the interconnections between schooling and processes of governance (including Bourdieu, Foucault, and others). Its reiteration, however, is perhaps necessary in the face of vehement calls from certain scholarly corners for a renewed emphasis on civics education in order to compensate for young people’s supposed lack of civic interest (see, for example, Hébert & Wilkinson, 2002; Osborne, 2000).

5.3 Beyond schooling: Cultural influences on the imagined ‘good citizen’

According to Althusser, Bourdieu, and other cultural theorists, education is a particularly powerful site of cultural reproduction. It is not the only one, however. Other sites include family, religion, and media. While the role of the family (particularly in the development of an activist habitus) will be addressed in the next chapter, in this section I turn (briefly) to media images of
youth activism, in order to broaden and strengthen my argument about the cultural edges of appropriate citizenship behaviour. I will also look at the other arm of the state, as identified by Althusser – that is, the repressive state apparatuses, or the state structures that move beyond the curtain of culture in order to enforce the desires and requirements of a state seeking to protect its own interests.

5.3.1 Media

Understanding media as upholding the interests of the state within Western liberal democracies flies in the face of common sense interpretations about the independence of media within such states. To include media within the umbrella of ISAs is not to suggest that the state controls media in any direct manner, such as takes place in regimes that do not label themselves as liberal democratic (communist states, for example). Rather, it is to make the more subtle argument that the mainstream media acts, alongside other institutions such as schooling and religion, with apparent autonomy, to uphold and reinforce the interests of the status quo, which generally in capitalist western countries happen to be the interests of the state.\(^{40}\) This can also be understood through the language of governance, in which the range of cultural mediators function together to generate a consistent set of ideas that people take up as the ‘common sense’ or ‘right way to be.’ Thus it is not only the ‘institutions’ of Althusser’s ‘Institutional State Apparatuses’ that create these forms of governance, but also what Rose (1999) calls new forms of social administration, which work also to administer bodies in reconstituting the social order.

The cultural role played by the mainstream media -- or what some activists have labelled ‘corporate media’ -- in reconstituting particular ideas about activism, is the focus of this section.

\(^{40}\) This argument cannot be applied to such alternate media sites as can be found on the Internet and in alternative newspapers and magazines. While the existence of these alternative sources of information are heartening, it is my assumption that the mainstream media continues to play a powerful role as the purveyor of cultural norms.
As Stuart Hall (1985) so eloquently describes, the state, as a concept, cannot be understood as a monolithic entity with straightforward intentions that can be read off without contradiction. Nonetheless, ‘the State remains one of the crucial sites in a modern capitalist social formation where political practices of different kinds are condensed’ (Hall, 1985, p. 93). He explains that, according to Althusser, ideological state apparatuses provide “the frameworks of thinking and calculation about the world – the ‘ideas’ which people use to figure out how the social world works, what their place is in it and what they ought to do” (1985, p. 99, emphasis in original).

The dilemma, as Hall points out, is to make sense of “how a society allows the relative freedom of civil institutions to operate in the ideological field, day after day, without direction or compulsion by the State; and why the consequence of the ‘free play’ of civil society, through a very complex reproductive process, nevertheless consistently reconstitutes ideology as a ‘structure in dominance’ (1985, p. 100, emphasis in original). “After all,” Hall notes, in democratic societies, it is not an illusion of freedom to say that we cannot adequately explain the structured biases of the media in terms of their being instructed by the State precisely what to print or allow on television. But precisely how is it that such large numbers of journalists, consulting only their ‘freedom’ to publish and be damned, do tend to reproduce, quite spontaneously, without compulsion, again and again, accounts of the world constructed within fundamentally the same ideological categories? (Hall, 1985, p. 101).

Hall offers no answer to this perplexing problem, posing it rather as one of the fundamental issues at the heart of Althusser’s formulation of the ideological state apparatuses. While unable to solve the associated theoretical difficulty, the ideological reproduction that Hall’s analysis points to within the media is a useful frame for attending to the media images below. That is, while it is far beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to describe why the media and schooling tend to reproduce the ideological presuppositions that support, for example, a particular construction of ‘good citizenship,’ the fact of their role in this process has been recognized and
analyzed by many scholars (Hall, 1985; Bourdieu, 1998). Thus I proceed with the assumption that mainstream media *can* be understood as one mode through which the cultural reproduction of ‘common sense’ notions of the ‘good citizen’ can be perceived (see also McRobbie, 2004).

Each of these images were drawn from the Globe and Mail, one of Canada’s two national newspapers, around the times of major demonstrations in Canada and the United States – the anti-WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, and the OCAP protests at Queen’s Park in Ontario in 2000 (the reader can also re-visit the image from the first chapter of this thesis, from the anti-FTAA protests in Quebec City in 2001). While these were certainly not the only representations of these protests at the time, the Globe and Mail is arguably one of the more powerful purveyors of cultural norms to the population at large within Canada. Notable also is that these images are now from a by-gone era – each of these mass mobilizations happened prior to the September 11th terrorist attacks. That I have no images from the period after this time is not a coincidence; while there have been numerous protests across the country since that time, few have garnered the attention of mainstream media, and none have precipitated the degree of coverage offered to the events documented here. The reasons for this are many, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to venture a larger discussion of why this might be the case.

For the sake of this chapter, the argument I am making about these images is as follows: when held up alongside the idea of the ‘good citizen’ within schooling, analyzed above, these images serve as the cultural place-marker for youth participation within the state – the point beyond which young people are symbolically cautioned to avoid, or pay the consequences. Whereas citizenship curricula offers conventional liberal democratic norms of participation, such as voting and debating, and modes of philanthropic community engagement in order to fulfill one’s citizenship obligations, these media images warn young people about what happens to
those who venture into that unacceptable realm of challenging the state: past this point of no
return lies hysteria, chaos, and ultimately (‘you brought it upon yourselves’) arrest. The images
do so by drawing on a much longer history of moral panic about young people and their role
within the state – young people have always been viewed with suspicion, and media
representations have often relied upon and stoked this underlying anxiety that has so often
accompanied public debate about the role of youth in society (Gauvreau, 2003; McRobbie, 1994;
Stephens, 1995).

These images, which each feature young, white men either being restrained by the police,
or facing them down in an impending confrontation, carry on within this tradition. They also, I
am arguing, do the work of presenting to the public, and to young people specifically, the
spectres of what happens to ‘bad’ kids who get involved in confrontations with the state.\footnote{That this message is not always taken up in this way by youth activists, or by the culture at large, is one of the contradictions and complications of any theoretical attempt to account for social realities. The peculiar role that being arrested plays in accruing specific forms of subcultural capital to young activists will be discussed in the next chapter.}
Illustration 4: The Globe and Mail, Wednesday, December 1st, 1999, page A11:


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Illustration 5: The Globe and Mail, Friday, June 16th, 2000, page A1

Illustration 5 has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The image removed is captioned ‘The Riot at Queen’s Park’ and depicts two young men with a mattress running towards a line of riot police, in front of the Ontario Legislature Building.
The power of these images to shape the cultural imaginary regarding what it means to be ‘an activist’ is felt amongst both activists themselves and those outside of this subculture. Many of the participants in this project would reference media images when attempting to describe what it meant to be ‘an activist.’ Jonathon, for example, responding to my prodding about something he had said earlier about the ‘stigma of activism’ noted:

Like I’m totally reacting to a stereotype, right? So I’m acting as the, I’m totally an example of how the system is working. Right? It’s really interesting. But if I were to create a stereotype, you know, it would be someone at a protest, you know, wearing a bandana or some you know, political propaganda, whether it be a Mao t-shirt or Che Guevara t-shirt, you know. A lot of the colour red and you know being very passionate about whatever cause it is that they’re fighting for.

Jonathon admitted that he had gotten this stereotype from the media (“The media loves that image,” he noted). The cultural power of the images portrayed above thus act on multiple fronts to shape the national imaginary of what it means to be ‘an activist.’ From my field notes, documenting a conversation I had with a relative of mine:

I made a note to myself to write in my field notes about my brief conversation with Simon on Sunday, during which he asked me about my research. As I began to describe it, struggling to find the words that would make sense to this middle-aged Jewish doctor who once proclaimed to me that his affluent American lifestyle was just the way life was supposed to be, I found myself saying that I was studying youth activists, then, somewhat wryly, adding, “you know, rabble rousers.” His 11 year-old daughter walked in at this point and asked what a youth activist was, and Simon said, laughing somewhat but I think being serious, “trouble makers.” Such are the ways in which activism becomes marginalized in polite company.

I was, of course, participating in the larger cultural scripts about activism by using ‘rabble-rousers’ in order to breach the ‘common sense barrier’ that lay between me and this relative of mine, who lives in a very different world from the one with which I am familiar. These examples are meant to illustrate the depth of reach which these cultural codes have, and to make the case
for how media, as one aspect of the cultural field, can serve to uphold and reinforce these particular ideas. Understanding young activists as ‘rabble-rousers’, ‘trouble-makers,’ or out-of-control maniacs constantly on the verge of arrest is one very powerful way in which the cultural sphere can reinforce for young people their own compliance with the liberal democratic ideals offered as the only reasonable way to participate in democracy in Canada.

5.3.2 Policing

The powerful cultural messages about what forms of ‘active citizenship’ are seen as most desirable have obviously not resulted in the quelling of activist participation. In those cases where young people persist in protesting injustices, the cultural messages give way to the array of institutional forces that Althusser has termed the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). The RSAs, as theorized by Althusser, make use of state-sanctioned violence to facilitate compliance with state norms and laws – police and army fall into this category. Many young activists within this study had experienced brutal treatment at the hands of Canadian police (municipal, provincial, and federal), particularly in the post September 11th era, where it appears that police repression of dissent has become more acceptable in the face of public anxiety about ‘terrorist threats.’ Aggressive policing could also be understood as a neo-liberal practice linked to governance (see Brown, 2005), designed to create anxiety and guilt. It does so, in part, by targeting those who are seen to have overstepped the bounds of legitimate citizenship behaviour – as delimited through and operating within such sites as education and media. Thus policing acts not only as a powerful material force limiting certain kinds of activist expression, it also serves as a state-sanctioned symbolic marker of the (ever-shrinking) limits to democratic participation for young people.
From Farah (age 27), describing several encounters she had with the police:

Farah: Ah there was just like a - a disperse order and no one was leaving in any rush. And a bunch of people had been arrested. So we decided we were going to walk down to the jail and then – so we started another march away from the Sheraton, which was where it was. And um all of a sudden cops just started charging from everywhere – riot cops just on foot. And police – lots of cops on horses. Um, and this guy had been – like couldn’t see and the cops were coming from everywhere because we’d been tear gassed so badly and - and I stopped to help him and I was with ah I was holding on to like both my friends’ hands from - from that house actually – my roommates and

Jackie: Yeah.

Farah: and I let go and somehow this guy got away and all of a sudden I was like on the ground and they had like 6 cops on me and they were just wailing away on me. Um, and that was kind of a chain reaction like one friend stopped and then got arrested. And then another one stopped cause they stopped and we ended up all getting arrested. But [phone ringing] [interruption phone call taken] so -

Jackie: What happened with that? Did you get charged?

Farah: Yeah I got charged – I think we only got off like a year ago or something. I think we got off. I just haven’t been really keeping up with it right? I was arrested the next year too. Um,

Jackie: What was that?

Farah: Um, the International Day Against Police Brutality. (laughing)

Jackie: (laughing) yeah.

Farah: But they did massive roundups a couple of years in a row. Um, and that was really brutal too. It was freezing rain in winter. And they kept us outside like squished together surrounded by cops in full riot gear for 4 hours or something in the rain. It was awful. People were peeing and like yeah. And they kept us on buses handcuffed really badly for a long time. And then I was racially harassed by one of the cops during that whole altercation. They – when they were booking me or whatever – they were tossing me around, calling me Islam. They kept referring to me as Islam – my last name is Islamic so.

Farah’s encounter with the police, amongst other factors in her life, led to post-traumatic stress disorder so severe that all of her hair fell out and she became chronically depressed. In this case, we can perhaps understand policing to have functioned here as a process of governance that
surveils previously acceptable behaviour and ultimately functions to individualize it, in Farah’s case to the point of illness.

Both Farah’s experiences and her account connect to a longer history of who is deemed ‘acceptable’ within the nation-state. Her description of the police treatment of the activists – massive roundups, being squished together, people forced to urinate in close quarters – evokes an image of activists as being treated as less-than-human, as beings without rights within the liberal democratic state (on the right to have rights, see Arendt, 1998; Benhabib, 2004). Farah’s specific experience of racial harassment is similarly tied to a particular history of the legitimate citizen – as we saw in the previous chapter, this category within Canada has until very recently been limited to white people. Thus we can understand the practices of policing to be predicated upon, at least in part, histories of the ‘legitimate person’ and citizen that, through their very actions, police are attempting to strip from activists. This is a powerful warning indeed to young people who have ventured past the limit of acceptable citizenship behaviour.

Other participants relayed encounters with the police that led to years of their time and money being taken up in lengthy court proceedings. Kieran (age 24) relays how he was arrested in the anti-FTAA protests in Quebec City in April of 2001:

Kieran: Police swept in, they arrested a bunch of people, I was one of those people and a –

Jackie: Okay. So you guys weren’t doing anything. You were just hanging out in the square?

Kieran: Yeah. It was just like one of these big group arrests. They did a couple of them over that week. Over that day I think it was like three, six and nine they did sweeps.

Jackie: And were you charged?

Kieran: Yeah.
Jackie: With anything? Yeah?

Kieran: Unlawful assembly.

Jackie: Unlawful. Oh my God.

Kieran: Unlawful assembly.

Jackie: Unlawful assembly. Were you held in jail then?

Kieran: Oh yeah. Yeah, I went to jail for two days.

Jackie: So you missed the rest of the protest?

Kieran: Yeah. Yeah. And the bus back. [laughs]

Jackie: And the bus back. Oh, Jesus.

Kieran: Yeah. And that was like really my kind of heads up. Kind of like, up until that point I was like, things are okay, you know. More or less, right? Like, sure there’s bullshit everywhere, but.

Jackie: Yeah.

Kieran: But. That was my like wake-up call. That things were not okay.

Again we can see the power of policing and the legal structures that support them to function as a disciplining process against those who have overstepped the bounds of socially and culturally sanctioned acts of citizenship. Although the right to protest is supposed to be enshrined within Canada’s liberal democratic legal protections, other laws can be brought to bear in order to block such expression (e.g. ‘unlawful assembly’). Similarly to Farah’s account, activists were stripped of the individual rights supposedly protected by liberal democracies through the process of what Kieran described as police ‘sweeps,’ whereby groups of people were indiscriminately arrested simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Several of the participants relayed either witnessing or being caught up in similar police tactics in both Canada and the U.S.; I have also
been witness to such patterns of arrest within my own activist work, suggesting that Kieran’s experience was not an isolated example of poor police behaviour.

Kieran’s trial was scheduled for July of that year, but he was told that he was going to be represented as part of a legal collective, comprised of others who had been arrested at the same time. He was later told that his charges had been dropped. Five years later, he was organizing a major march in Montreal:

Kieran: They called me up the night before the march and said.
Jackie: Who called you up?
Kieran: The police.
Jackie: Mmm. The RCMP?
Kieran: The Sureté du Québec. And said we have a warrant for your arrest, we have a bench warrant and we have to exercise it and we have 20 officers looking for you.
Jackie: What’s a bench warrant?
Kieran: A bench warrant is a, is a warrant to bring you to trial. It means you have missed your trial and must be brought to the bench.
Jackie: Oh, God.
Kieran: Or to your hearing. It’s not even a trial. It’s a hearing.
Jackie: Wow. So last year you’re getting ready to organize a big protest, march. Or a big march.
Kieran: March. Not a protest.
Jackie: Just a march.
Kieran: A march in support of action on climate change.
Jackie: Right.
Kieran: And, yeah. And we’d been working with the police to organize this march. Obviously.
Jackie: So they knew your name already?

Kieran: Oh, yeah.

Jackie: You were already in their view.

Kieran: Oh, yeah.

Jackie: But the day before.

Kieran: The day before, the night before, I was on my way to a social, which I’d organized for all the youth at the climate negotiations and yeah. And.

Jackie: So what happened?

Kieran: So. Yeah, so. Well, I was on my way out of the convergence centre. I was with a few other people and finally just going to, like, I’d been trapped in there all night trying to handle everything and 200 Middlebury, or 200 students from Vermont had come up and they were all going to sleep there. … And then finally was like, okay, I’m leaving now. I am leaving. And then I got a call and I didn’t recognize the number so I didn’t take it. And then they called again and so I took it. And it was this police officer. I mean, in retrospect I wish I’d never taken it. But, but yeah. So. And he said, oh we have this warrant for your arrest and I said you’ve got to be joking me, like, you know, you had five years. You had my number, you had my address, da, da, da. What the hell? Well, that doesn’t matter now. I want you to come meet me. I was like, I’m not going to come meet you somewhere.

Jackie: Right.

Kieran: Not even the station, he was like, I want you to meet me somewhere.

Jackie: Oh my God. Some random street corner?


Jackie: Whoa.

Kieran: Yeah, so I basically said well I’ll call you back when I’ve spoken to my lawyer because I don’t need to talk to you at all until I speak to my lawyer. And you know that so I don’t know what you’re trying to do. And then I called people, NGO people. … Anyway, I went into hiding. Pretty much went into hiding with the march coordinator. And we spent the night, called all the unions and then got a union lawyer. And I just, it was like, I mean, I already couldn’t think because I was trying to do so many things. And to have this dropped on my plate? I was just
like, what the hell is going on? It felt very, like I had no control of the situation and anyway we spent the morning on the phones working it out and then finally got the police to agree not to arrest me at the march. So I went to the march and the march was great.

Although it is possible that the timing of the renewed police interest in Kieran’s case and his organizing of a large-scale march was coincidental, Kieran and his legal advisors certainly felt that it was more than that. Kieran drew on the broader discourses of legitimacy by emphasizing that he was organizing a ‘march’ over a ‘protest’ (the former being something that good citizens do, the latter being the action of a bad activist). This semantic tactic may well have worked in his favour as he and his lawyers worked to negotiate with the police for him to be allowed to complete his work – that is, a march in support of combating climate change, easily aligned with the contemporary notion of the ‘good citizen’

These are only two of many stories relayed to me about young people’s encounters with the police. What these stories convey is that the shaping of the ‘good citizen’ is not contained to merely the ideological/cultural aspects of governance, such as schooling and mainstream media. The state also plays an active role in policing (literally) the limits of democratic participation with which young people might engage. Not only does this result in physical, emotional, and financial harm for the young people involved in political action; it also serves as a powerful warning to those who dare to engage in protest actions designed to challenge the state. Similar to the media images above, the policing of youth activism acts as a form of governmentality that helps to ensure compliance with the forms of responsible, self-regulating, liberal democratic participation promoted in civics curriculum.
5.4 Conclusions

The production and regulation of the ‘good citizen’ within the Canadian state is accomplished through a variety of cultural means, not least of which emanate from schooling but which also extend beyond its boundaries. The possibility for active participation within the state, while explicated as an ideal of the new civics curricula, comes with a particular set of limits and expectations about what such participation looks like. Drawing on histories of liberalism and current ideologies of neoliberalism, the ‘active citizen’ of contemporary civics curriculum is one who engages with the state through self-regulated acts of ‘responsible’ citizenship that are limited to individual encounters with the electoral process, charitable community work, and/or participation through formal aspects of the political system, such as official parties. Aside from being almost entirely meaningless within the context of young people’s lives, these forms of citizenship participation replicate the idea of democracy as being something that takes place only through liberal democratic structures -- that is, only through the individual’s relation to the state, as an individual. Critiques of this particular vision for democracy are wide-spread and long-standing, and are further elaborated within the next chapter (see Arendt, 1998; Brown, 1995; 2001; Habermas, 1996; Hernández, 1997; Mouffe, 1993; Young, 1990 for a few examples).

Alongside an account of the limited vision of democracy and citizenship on offer through mainstream versions of civics education, as experienced by participants, this chapter has sought to demonstrate how histories of racism and classism continue to shape the experiences of young people attempting to take up concepts of ‘citizenship.’ In navigating the explicit and implicit cultural expectations about the ‘good citizen,’ young people are confronted with a bewildering set of contradictory messages. On the one hand, they are told by civics teachers and curricula that activities such as community engagement and voluntarism are desirable aspects of the ‘good
citizen,’ as long as they happen within the frame of ‘responsible citizenship,’ as documented
within Chapter 4. On the other hand, the submerged cultural messages that young people
encounter provide evidence for them that the rewards and benefits of such participation are
aligned with stratifications of class and ‘race.’ For example, as pressures to perform within the
‘new global economy’ continue to increase, ‘good citizenship’ is employed as one more strategy
to enhance one’s CV, often exacerbating pre-existing class stratifications. While no one is telling
working class, Aboriginal, and racialized young people not to participate in the norms of ‘good
citizenship,’ their experiences within the school system and amongst their peers reinforces for
them the realities they face: that ‘good citizenship,’ as it is elaborated within the cultural sphere,
continues to be heavily regulated and governed through the languages and contingent discourses
of normative liberal principles, which are in turn grounded within a history of symbolic
domination that perpetuates class and ‘race’ disadvantages.

Even those who venture into the realm of activism receive their fair warning, through
other cultural modes, about where the limits to legitimate citizenship lie. Through media images
of out-of-control activists, and through the more violent aspects of the repressive state
apparatuses of policing and the justice system, young people are given a clear message about the
boundaries of permissible citizenship. Those who dare to challenge this are treated as criminals
whose rights to freedom of movement and expression are regularly curbed (and those from
racialized groups who dare to challenge are treated even worse).

Canadian youth are thus exposed to an array of cultural messages that function as forms
of governance in order to prevent them from behaving in ways that might challenge the
legitimacy and practices of the state. This ought not to be surprising to anyone; as various
theorists, including Foucault, Bourdieu, Althusser, and Rose (amongst others) have argued, the
state protects its own interests through a variety of processes intended to, on the one hand, render
the population self-regulating and distanced from the social welfare state, psychologically
managed and administered through new reordered state ideals, and, on the other hand, quell
those who are not appropriately self-regulating through the use of state-sanctioned violence.
What is of interest, I think, is that the recent rise in civics curriculum across these Western liberal
democratic states (including Canada) indicates some degree of uncertainty about how well the
state is managing to encourage the appropriate self-regulation of its own citizens. Particularly in
the face of neoliberal policy priorities that have resulted in growing disparities between rich and
poor, alongside the ever-increasing policing of borders that have emerged in the post-9/11 world,
perhaps the recent increase in civics education ought to be understood, at least in part, as a form
of governance that is intended to quell the emergent strands of critique that saw their expression
through the mass mobilizations in Seattle, Quebec, and elsewhere.

What is of particular interest in this phenomenon is how the cultural messages about the
‘good citizen’ are employed, refuted, and responded to within youth activist subcultures
themselves. What does it mean to engage in activism as a young person within the current
configurations of contradictory messages? On the one hand, the message from civics curriculum
and the Craig Keilburgers of the world is that one’s citizenship duty includes acts of charity that
are often re-labelled as ‘activism’ – so activism is good. On the other hand, those who engage in
forms of activism that directly confront the state and its policies are represented as maniacs,
and/or imprisoned – so activism is bad. Weaving through this are the immanent cultural
messages about the liberal subject and his or her responsibility to the state (whereby failure is
then converted to guilt), as well as the classed and racialized aspects of citizenship and
belonging, such that the particular cultural space through which young activists must pass is a
quagmire of contradictory messages and implications. How have youth activist subcultures responded to this particular cultural atmosphere? I move forward to address this question in the next chapter.
Over the last two chapters, I have offered a window of illumination into the cultural and historical landscapes of the ‘good citizen,’ through which young activists traverse as they negotiate their own relationship to activism, to the state, and to each other. I have done this for several reasons. First, I wish to respond to the hermeneutic challenge of situating any social analysis of the cultural formations of youth ‘activism’ within a larger historical and socio-cultural context, as well as to project the practice of activism away from individuals -- and their apparent responsibilities or failures to act -- and into the world of culture. Another aim of this approach is to provide some conceptual weight to the claims I have made about the problematic elements of regulation associated with the classed, gendered, and racialized notion of good citizenship operating through various structural and discursive forms. Specifically, I am concerned with the manner in which histories of liberal discourses, symbolic and material forms of racism, colonialism and class conflicts, as well as the contemporary ascendancy of neoliberalism, have created a specific cultural space that have identifiably shaped youth activist subcultures in Canada. In doing so, this chapter seeks to expand upon the response to my first research question: “What might be some of the cultural, symbolic and subcultural elements of contemporary Canadian youth activism at the turn of the 21st century?”

Having laid this groundwork, I now turn toward a more systematic qualitative assessment of the ‘symbolic economy’ of youth activist cultures themselves, or to the ‘horizons of choice’

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42 A version of this chapter will be submitted to the *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, for a special issue entitled “Youth, cultural politics and new social spaces in an era of globalization.” Kennelly, J. *Learning to protest: Youth activist cultural politics in contemporary urban Canada.*

43 The concept of ‘symbolic economy’ is grounded here within Bourdieu’s (1997) concept of ‘symbolic capital’: “One of the most unequal of all distributions, and probably, in any case, the most cruel, is the distribution of symbolic capital, that is, of social importance and of reasons for living” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 241). Julie Bettie (2003) uses the concept ‘symbolic economy’ in a similar way to mine in her ethnography of working class girls in rural California.
(Ball, Maguire, & Macrae, 2000) that are available to young people in 21st century Canada upon entering into that complex terrain called ‘activism.’ The central argument I wish to make is that youth activist subcultures are shaped by each of the regulatory forces I have identified throughout the last two chapters: histories of liberalism, the production of the ‘good citizen’ along lines of class, gender, and ‘race’, the ambivalence associated with community participation that strays into activism, and the increasing cultural pressure to perform as a neoliberal subject in times of state retrenchment. While the individuals who have participated in this research are, of course, much more than the sum of these historical and cultural parts, their experiences and struggles speak to the symbolic presence of these forces. It is the aim of this chapter to articulate some of the ways in which these forces and discursive practices have arisen within youth activist subcultures, and consider the implications of this for social movements and youth participation within the state.

The chapter is divided into three sub-sections. In the first section, I consider the influence of liberalism and neoliberalism, reading the pressures faced by young activists through the lens of these two ideological forces. Here, I argue that histories of both liberalism and the construction of the ‘good and moral citizen’ play a specific kind of regulating role for young activists, creating a structure of feeling (Williams, 1977) that is marked by substantial burdens of guilt and responsibility. I also argue that the forms of individualism central to the operation of the liberal state, and the specific relationship this implies between citizens and the nation, is undergoing a transformation via the pressures of neoliberalism and the ongoing shift of the burden of citizen well-being away from the state and towards individuals (Beck, 1999; Brown, 2001, 2005; Rose, 1999). In the second section, I consider the classed and raced nature of contemporary Canadian youth activism, drawing primarily on the cultural sociological work of
Pierre Bourdieu, and the work of two contemporary youth theorists who have made use of his ideas (Sarah Thornton (1996) and Julie Bettie (2003)). My primary argument here is that the symbolic economy of belonging within youth activist subcultures is bound by a particular set of cultural codes that can perhaps be best understood through Thornton’s notion of ‘subcultural capital’ and Bettie’s concept of ‘class performance.’\footnote{Both of these concepts are defined in detail below.} Layered upon histories of classism and racism, as well as the wide-spread pressures of liberalism and neoliberalism, I argue that this combination of social/cultural forces yields specific subcultural permutations that have a material impact on who feels that they ‘belong’ within youth activist cultures, and what such cultural belonging entails.

The third and final section turns to rituals of style and their relation to consumption and identity; given the classed and raced nature of youth activist subcultures, as well as the neoliberal context through which they come to activism, this segment will look more specifically at who carries symbolic authorization within youth activist subcultures – who, in other words, are the bearers of authorized language (Bourdieu, 1991), and what consumptive strategies do they use to maintain their position as agents in a cultural field of apparent authority? Drawing on ethnographic data concerned with such symbolic elements of subcultures as dress and appearance, as well as the ways in which specific people acquire the elusive and desirable status of being ‘radical,’ I argue that the subcultural rules of comportment required within youth activist cultures are embedded within neoliberal frames of individualized consumption that have specific implications for social movements and progressive social change more broadly.
6.1 On guilt and responsibility: Liberalism’s legacy, neoliberalism’s ascendancy

As Susie and I took the elevator together up to the 12th floor of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where we were going to do our interview, she mentioned that she had been reading Now magazine [a weekly arts magazine published in Toronto] and had been feeling guilty about it. She was referring to a presentation that she had seen me do on corporate control of media at [a social justice organization in Toronto], in which I had discussed the fact that Eye [a different weekly arts magazine published in Toronto] was published by the Toronto Star [a centrist daily broadsheet published throughout Ontario]. She had thought I had said that Now was published by the Toronto Star. I tried to reassure her, and point out that it was alright that we read these things, the trick was to know where they were coming from.

- from fieldnotes, October 12, 2006

‘I resolve to…change the world! Hundreds of ways you can make a difference’
- NOW magazine cover, January 4th to 10th, 2007 (Volume 26, No.18)

Both chapters 4 and 5 have referenced the ways in which the Canadian ideological sphere has been highly influenced by the notion of liberalism. As a political ideal, liberalism has a long and complex history, one for which it is far beyond the capacity of this thesis to do justice. The basic premises, built upon the political philosophies of John Locke (1993 (1690)), Adam Smith (1986 (1776)), and John Stuart Mill (Mill, 1988 (1859)) (amongst others), are that every individual is free and equal under the law, that such freedom is based on the human capacity to reason, and that inviolable rights to property and the sale of one’s labour within the free market flow from these basic traits. Such a philosophy of liberalism, entrenched as it is within Western traditions, came about in opposition to religious hierarchies that figured social interactions so that the King was viewed as inherently superior to the peasant, in keeping with his place within the realm as the representative of God (Laslett, 1993). The original political impulse driving a philosophy of liberalism can thus be understood as a progressive stance, intended to widen the health and welfare of the population. However, as has been argued by many scholars, particularly since the post-War period, liberal democracy, and the rights it is supposed to protect, has become less a development of freedom “than of an increasingly administered society – a
civil society of bureaucratic agencies and a civic currency of proceduralism and litigiousness” (Brown, 2001, p. 12. See also, Foucault, 1994b; Marcuse, 1991 (1964)). Alongside the technologies of oversight and bureaucracy that make up modern liberal democratic states, lies the ever-increasing pressure to become self-regulating, a hallmark of what Rose (1999) calls ‘advanced liberalism,’ and others such as Wendy Brown (2005) have identified as neoliberalism.

The specific manner in which such self-regulation takes place is shaped by prevailing notions within liberal democracy about the role of the individual in relation to the state. That is, the role of the individual exists only as an individual, and as such, is only able to interact with the state through his or her individual acts, most primarily voting. Bourdieu notes that the act of voting strips the decision-making process from any intimation of social interaction or mutual accountability:

The liberal vision identifies the elementary act of democracy as it is ordinarily conceived with the solitary, nay silent and secret, action of individuals…[B]y bringing into existence, on a specific day, the succession of individuals who ‘pass one after another before the ballot box’ and by suspending ‘for a moment,’ just long enough to make a choice, all social bonds, between husband and wife, father and son, employer and employee, priest and parishioner, teacher and pupil,…, it reduces groups to a detotalized series of individuals whose ‘opinion’ will never be more than a statistical aggregation of individual opinions individually expressed (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 57).

To put this somewhat differently, what Bourdieu is arguing is that voting comes to represent something which is similar to, and consumed by, a kind of economic rationality which sees democracy as the aggregate result of individual choices (or purchases) within the political marketplace. It is my argument that such an individualized vision of democracy, and of one’s relation to the state, has resulted in a particular structure of feeling (Williams, 1977) that manifests within youth activist subcultures as an overwhelming burden of individualized responsibility and its powerful psychic associate, guilt. This is further complicated by the forces
of governmentality that have emerged around neoliberal ideals, specifically an inexorable focus on the individual, and the individual’s capacity (and requirement) to make the best of his or her own life. This ‘self-perfecting’ subject is bombarded with messages about how to live well and be happy, with the suggestion that achieving such self-actualization is equivalent to fulfilling any political or ethical obligations that he or she might have (Rose, 1999, cf p 166). In other words, activism, as it is expressed and experienced within 21st century Canada, has largely become a form of self-realization, just as has voting. The larger pressures for such self-actualization are manifested within the cultural realm through, to name a few examples, the proliferation of self-help marketing techniques and the vast expansion of psycho-therapeutic regimes (Rose, 1999). It is experienced by young people as a requirement for reflexivity that can be overwhelming:

Vincent: But, yeah. In terms of that responsibility? I don’t know. I mean, I guess there is a sense. I mean, I guess there needs to be some kind of a sense of empathy, like a greater empathy to be able to you know. Or, you know, to at least be able to track, you know, a crying Palestinian kid on TV back to yourself sitting in your living room, like, being able to kind of have an awareness of like, how that kid is sort of related to, you know, what you do when you go out on the street and do your work everyday, live your life and you know?

Jackie: Yeah

Vincent: So in that sense maybe it’s like a, an extreme or you know even pathological self-awareness. Like a constant self-awareness (age 26).

As reflected upon by Vincent, amongst the many relevant messages directed towards Canadian young people is that their individual development depends to a certain degree on their capacity to understand and help others, particularly those located elsewhere in the world. This is imagined within the wider cultural realm to result in both feeling better about oneself while simultaneously strengthening one’s CV (and thus making oneself more marketable in the competitive global economy). These values take a specific form shaped in part, I would suggest, by Canada’s unique
role within global power relations; that is, young people are prompted to ‘save the world,’ a lofty goal remarkable both for its abstraction from reality and its hubric suggestion that ‘the world,’ writ large, is in need of saving. I am not suggesting here that young Canadians ought not to be aware of what is happening in the world, nor that they ought not to be offering support where necessary. My concern, rather, is with how both the ‘awareness’ and the ‘offers of support’ are structured and experienced so that they often slip into an uneasy occupation with the unfamiliar ‘Other’ (Bhabha, 1994). This can act to convert the human capacity for solidarity and compassion to an essentializing reflex that does little to rectify the very complex social, economic, and political problems that trouble the vast majority of the world’s population. It thus can act to distance, rather than build genuine human connections, particularly in how it plays out within our contemporary liberal and neoliberal milieu, with its specific messages about what it means to be a ‘good citizen.’

That such messages were deeply felt and honoured by young activists was evident from interviews in which participants reflected on their early sense of wanting to work towards social change:

And I remember, uh, there was this environmental club that was somehow connected to Safeway? – I don’t really remember, but, these stickers were pivotal for me! It was a picture of the globe, and kids can save the world, it was this mini-campaign that they had started, I’m not sure where it came from. But it was, to me it’s a real marker of where it started (Minna, age 23).

And so in a way it’d be like well we’re not going to be like that. We’re going to do something different and have an impact on the world (Andrew, age 28).

I always wanted to change the world, you know? (Daniel, age 21)

It made me realize that I can change the world (Carolyn, age 20).

What I mean by this is that Canada, widely constructed as a ‘peacekeeping’ nation, stakes part of its identity on the capacity of both the nation and the individuals within it to be ‘saviours’ to the rest of the world. What such a construction does not mention, of course, is the way in which Canada (and a specific, limited number of Canadians) has also benefited from historical colonial relations that concentrate power within the hands of Western countries.
Such sentiments, highly consistent with the wider cultural pressures to be a particular kind of ‘good citizen,’ needs to be understood as a specific cultural phenomenon happening within high modern, individualizing times, within a country that holds a dominant position in global power relations. Thus the professed desire to ‘change the world,’ generally expressed as a childhood aspiration, partially reveals the specific parameters of youth activism within Canada – as an individualized phenomenon that obliterates the interconnections between Canada and the ‘world’ of which it is a part. It also becomes part of a structure of feeling such that the prevalent cultural claims about what it is to be a ‘good person’ (or citizen) becomes associated with grandiose impossibilities (set up to fail): to ‘save the world.’

What are the implications and consequences of such a widespread articulation of the possibilities for social change? By individualizing social change struggles, it is easy to slip into an associated sense that one can never ‘do enough,’ so that the belief in one’s individual lack turns quickly into guilt:

Well I was working at this horrible job one summer and I just felt like I’m becoming a horrible person because I’m not doing anything for people, right? School was over. I was disconnected with, you know, going out every Thursday to a different activist event. And I just became really, like, oh no. I’m not doing enough (Suzie, age 23).

And when it’s really hard to not feel the weight of things, and all things bad when you come into consciousness, it’s like, symptomatic white guilt, it’s like, whatever. Um, which I dealt with already (laughter), but I do feel like it’s hard to say no when you’re able to see what is going on and see that you can do something that can contribute to making change (Minna, age 23).

Well I came here [to university] to study music—classical music and—which is something I’ve done since I was 5. So I don’t really remember my life before I ended up being a musician. But got here and you know been having doubts before I came here about going into music. You know had suddenly been exposed to the rest of the world and didn’t know if playing in an orchestra was really what I wanted to do or you know feeling a lot of guilt as well for being a musician when all of this other stuff was going on in the world (Carolyn, age 20).
One consequence, then, of an individualizing rhetoric about one’s own personal responsibility to ‘save the world’ is the psychic cost that comes with carrying a burden too heavy for any one individual to reasonably take on. Such a psychic cost often comes with an associated physical cost; there are many notes from my field work of participants arriving at events or interviews battling colds, being under-slept or nursing some other kind of illness. Also, while this was not a specific question within the interviews, many participants referenced experiences of stress, depression and burnout. Also of relevance here is that each of the excerpts above are from female participants; such feelings of guilt were more commonly expressed amongst women than men within my research, and may well reflect the gendered histories of the liberal state, where women are charged with the burden of ‘caring’ as one way in which they can express their citizenship obligations (see Arnot & Dillabough, 1999; Lister, 2003).

Indeed, a theme that emerged, particularly within the focus groups where participants had a chance to speak to one another, was the struggle between ‘being happy’ and ‘doing the work.’ An extensive discussion ensued during one of these focus groups in which the participants commiserated over the impossibility of ‘finding balance’ while being an activist. The pressure to ‘be a martyr,’ as noted by one participant during this discussion, is intense:

Diane: So I used to feel a lot of stress and tension around like [being a] blind purist. Around my beliefs and have sort of -- relaxed a bit I guess -- and just found more of a balance within myself. One of my triggers or like issues are people that are like ‘if I kill myself the world will be changed.’ Because that just drives me mental for lots of reasons. Particularly around all of the privileges that I think comes with that. Cause there’s a lot of privilege in being able to just focus on yourself. But—it’s actually about finding a balance and so still being in the streets -- and whatever that looks like for me—but also not beating myself up every time that I need to buy something that isn’t local or organic or however you want to like—whatever labels you want to put on it. Union-made or whatever.
The pressures upon the liberal subject navigating a cultural realm that lays the overwhelming burden for social change on the shoulders of the individual are intense, as described by Diane, so intense that they can push young people to opt out of activist work. In another focus group, one participant who had become actively involved in social justice causes as a young teenager relayed that she had ultimately given up activism because of the associated emotional burdens:

Sherry: Yeah, it could have been an age thing and also like sitting in meetings is not fun. I don’t enjoy it at all. I don’t enjoy emails, I don’t enjoy phone calls and I really don’t even enjoy rallies. And I enjoy snowboarding and wave boarding and forests and mountains and anyway other people don’t [worry about this stuff] (laughing). My mom has been working in activist whatever for however long in her working life and she’s like working sometimes 14 hours a day. And it’s giving her health problems and she’s the most strapping person I’ve ever met. And like she’s doing a really good thing like fighting child poverty and putting it on the agenda with this government and stuff like this – really important but her quality of life is terrible. In my opinion. And so I - I really respect her commitment, [but] I would much rather enjoy my life as much as I can. And smile at everybody and feel like not angry and disconnected and when I was working in Vancouver activist groups I’d be so angry at the world and everything and I’d go home and I’d cry. And I didn’t know what to do with myself but it was just so much better having friends and going out and having a really good time.

Sherry here describes in great detail the emotional and physical costs that her involvement in activist work required of her, and her ultimate decision to leave in order to escape these pressures. In the next breath, however, she highlights the guilt that she carries for having abdicated her role as a ‘good activist’ (and good citizen):

Sherry: I mean I - I realize there’s terrible things going on in the world and it’s – I feel a little bit selfish to be ignoring all that and just focusing on my own personal happiness. But I do feel that it’s one thing that will make the world a better place is more happy people. Instead of one that’s just people on their computers.

The particular way in which the dichotomy between ‘caring for self’ and ‘caring for others’ is set up, I would suggest, is in many ways unique to places such as Canada, with its specific blend of liberal democracy, its mythology about being a ‘helping nation,’ its privileged locale within
global power relations, and the claims that have flowed from that about what it means to be a ‘good citizen’ in the contemporary moment. This discussion came from the Vancouver focus group:

Angela: I guess I just think that a lot of the drive that is required to sustain activism—doesn’t necessarily come from happiness.

Minna: Yeah.

Jackie: Where do you think it comes from?

Angela: (laughing) well it depends on the person. For me—anger or—sadness. For sure.

Minna: And guilt. And privilege can have a lot to do with it too. And also like—feeling like you have some control over some little slice of your world. Cause if you’re not doing anything—you’re not—you know—you’re doing something with some control. If it’s not it feels like you have some control.

The structures of feeling that these passages reveal are marked by a flurry of emotions – guilt, anxiety, feeling out of control, sadness, and anger. Again, it may not be a coincidence that these conversations happened between the women in the focus group, as women are expected to manage the emotional work associated with social change (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). Also noticeable was that these emotional responses were remarked upon again and again by young people who were born and raised in Canada. This stood in stark contrast to the feelings of those who had either spent their formative years outside of Western liberal democracies, or had otherwise come to activism through a sense of personal impact. Fernando (age 23) grew up in Latin America and came to Canada as a refugee with his family, escaping political persecution. Judging from his transcripts and my field observations, his approach to activism was much less guilt-ridden. For example, while he sees the value in organizing, he is also interested in partying, dancing, and playing video games, and joked with me in the interview about Canadian activists taking themselves so seriously. Stuart (age 23), who is a member of a First Nations band, also
spoke of activism without the inflections of guilt and responsibility that marked many of the other interviews, but rather as a set of opportunities that brought him deeper into his community and allowed him to work on issues that personally affected him. Samina (age 25), who had migrated to the U.S. then Canada from India, noted her discomfort with the term ‘activist,’ because her activism has arisen out of personal experiences and thus looks very different than that of the wider ‘activist community’ in Canada:

> That’s why I don’t know if it’s really helpful, because I don’t really identify as an activist, I don’t think I make really conscious decisions. Like around immigration stuff, it’s being personally implicated, I’ve had deportation orders, I’ve had CSIS at my house, I’ve been detained. It’s just kind of how it goes. It’s not really an option. Like I’ve been detained three or four times in the last three or four years.

What these differences reveal, I would suggest, is that activism has come to be structured within Canada as something that some people do for and on behalf of others. Certainly, there are many within activist communities who have recognized this dichotomy. For example, Spirodon (age 25), a participant who was born and raised in Canada, noted that the fact that people are not personally implicated makes it impossible to develop a genuine social movement, as it will always simply be individuals acting on behalf of others rather than acting for themselves. During the Toronto focus group, an extensive conversation ensued about the fact that activists in the city were often not personally implicated in the causes they fought for, and what this meant.

Indeed, how people related to the word ‘activist’ during interviews speaks volumes about the contradictory claims that are attached to this very controversial term. Some would remark upon their uneasiness about whether they were ‘entitled’ to call themselves activists, wondering whether they had done enough to deserve the name. Others disliked the term and preferred not to use it, choosing ‘organizer’ or ‘agitator’ over ‘activist,’ which they felt had been co-opted. This array of responses to the notion of ‘the activist’ is mirrored within broader cultural scripts. As
noted in chapter 5, cultural representations of ‘activism’ (through education and media) waffle between activism as desirable – as long as it is carried out by middle class actors within the confines of the law – and activism as equivalent to hooliganism, particularly once it steps beyond the boundaries of good citizenship. That ‘activism’ has come to have so many meanings indicates that this is a term with a cultural, historical and social burden needing to be unravelled.

It is my argument that the controversy about what is ‘an activist’ in fact highlights many of the competing strands that this chapter is attempting to uncover. As I have noted in previous chapters, we have on the one hand ‘the activist’ as good citizen, the active, engaged individual who also happens to carry a number of middle class markers (cf Craig Keilburger). This ‘activist’ is the true heir to liberal democratic values, and its incipient child, neoliberalism. The ‘activist,’ in this case, is motivated by feelings of individual responsibility to the state and community (which turn quickly to feelings of guilt if one’s perceived responsibility is not fulfilled), and ultimately curtails his or her behaviour so as to not challenge the state beyond particular limits. It also takes place within an individualized frame that assumes a rational actor making individual decisions separate from any sense of integrated relationships, and using activism as one aspect of a larger project of perpetual self-improvement. It is this notion of activism that participants are implicitly referencing when they want to distance themselves from the term, as a state-sanctioned and placated version of the work they are attempting to do.

On the other hand, there lies ‘the activist’ as enemy of the state, the trouble-making hooligans who are to be found on the front covers of newspapers being dragged away by heavily armoured police. These representations of ‘the activist’ carry their own peculiar weight within activist subcultures, whereby one is seen as ‘more committed’ if one has been identified by the state as a trouble-maker. These are, perhaps, the images that come to mind when people are not
certain they deserve the label ‘activist.’ Thus the peculiar legacies of liberalism and neoliberalism, as well as Canada’s unique role within global power relations, create a particular cultural space within which young people experience, emotionally and bodily, the demands and requirements of activist cultures.

6.2 Struggles for recognition: enacting class performances to acquire subcultural capital

Where histories of liberalism and contemporary pressures of neoliberalism can go some way in explaining some of the cultural forces experienced by young people involved in activist subcultures, there are aspects of activist subcultural practices that require a broader analytical framework in order to gain some insight into their causes and consequences. In particular, the experience of unwritten ‘rules’ of behaviour that marked one’s belonging or exclusion within activist subcultures was common across all three cities. In an attempt to situate the purpose that such ‘rules’ play, I turn to the theoretical insights of Bourdieu’s cultural sociological concepts of *field, doxa, habitus, and cultural capital.*

6.2.1 Revisiting Bourdieu: framing concepts

Bourdieu suggests that every field contains a doxa, whereby a field can be broadly understood as the specific socio-cultural context within which people interact, and the doxa of the field encapsulates the set of common-sense assumptions that are inherent to that field. A field, which Bourdieu also calls the ‘social space,’ works on the bodies that inhabit it so that, if they are able to, they begin to align themselves with the appropriate doxa so as to feel ‘at ease’ within the social space:

The structures of the social space (or of fields) shape bodies by inculcating in them, through the conditionings associated with a position in that space, the
cognitive structures that these conditionings apply to them. More precisely, the social world, because it is an object of knowledge for those who are included in it, is, in part, the reified or incorporated product of all the different (and rival) acts of knowledge of which it is the object (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 183).

He describes the ‘cognitive structures’ required to navigate the social space (or field) as a form of *practical knowledge* that emerges psychically and bodily within and/or between the players in the field. That is, the people who make up the social space each embody a sense of what it means to belong to a particular space, and what the relational rules are that will dictate one’s belonging or exclusion within the space. He writes:

> Each agent has a practical, bodily knowledge of her present and potential position in the social space, a ‘sense of one’s place,’ as Goffmann puts it, converted into a *sense of placement* which governs her experience of the place occupied, … defined absolutely and above all relationally as a rank, and the way to behave in order to keep it (‘pulling rank’) and to keep within it (‘knowing one’s place’, etc) (Bourdieu, 1997, p 184).

The relation of habitus to field is a complex one; Bourdieu describes the *habitus* as “a system of dispositions to be and to do, [it] is a potentiality, a desire to be which, in a certain way, seeks to create the conditions of its fulfillment, and therefore to create the conditions most favourable to what it is” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 150). He sees the process by which the agent seeks out a field most compatible with his or her own habitus as taking place through the practical implementation of such emotional responses to situations like “sympathies and antipathies, affections and aversions, tastes and distastes” (ibid). It is these emotional responses which assist an individual in determining whether he or she feels ‘at home’ in the social space and through which one can fulfill “one’s desire to be which one identifies with happiness” (ibid).

> It is within the specific social space or field that one’s *cultural capital* becomes relevant – that is, cultural capital is not a universal attribute that can be accommodated across all fields. This idea is best captured, particularly in the case of youth subcultures, by Sarah Thornton’s
(1996) notion of *subcultural capital*, which highlights the inextricably contextual nature of cultural capital. Thornton describes subcultural capital as “embodied in the form of being ‘in-the-know’” (p 11), a process of identification and recognition that is highly context-dependent. Such capital must still be subjected to a class analysis\(^46\), whereby one’s capacity to take up and enact a specific subcultural identity is shaped by one’s class position within a stratified society. The harms that such stratification can engender for individuals within the social space is further captured by Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic violence.’ Where cultural capital can be understood, most simply, as “the investment of economic resources in cultural assets and embodied social attributes and propensities” (Moore, 2004, p. 446), Bourdieu’s typology is made more complex by noting that it is the nature of cultural capital to be *systematically misrecognized*. This misrecognition serves to obscure the ways in which it is initially linked to economic status (see Moore, 2004). It is through this obfuscation that the enactment of cultural capital within a specific field comes to be linked to forms of power, and how it can thus become an integral aspect of the symbolic violence that helps to maintain the distinctions between those who feel that they are ‘in place’ (or ‘in the know’) versus those who are ‘out of place.’

The manner in which cultural capital plays out within fields that are outside of the mainstream – within subcultures, in other words – becomes further complicated by the relation of what Cohen has referred to as a “dominated culture” to a “dominant” one. That is, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, I am not in agreement with the classic Birmingham School’s analysis of subcultural practice as always belonging to the working classes, although I *do* think that they can be understood as existing in relation to a dominant culture. To turn to the example with which

\(^{46}\) Thornton’s work on the British rave scene does not, in my view, sufficiently elaborate the classed nature of various forms of subcultural capital, suggesting in her ethnography that this form of capital was not specific to people from a single class background. While this may have been the case, I would not be surprised if some people were able to take up the subcultural capital that she describes more easily than others, and that this was partially determined by one’s class position.
this thesis is concerned, youth activist subcultures, it is clear that people within these communities have sought each other out as a form of refuge against a wider mainstream culture that many find to be intensely problematic. This does not mean, however, that they are able to escape the larger relations of power within which we are all embedded in a stratified society. However, I would suggest, because of their very existence as a subculture, the forms of symbolic violence become more difficult to discern, as the potential for misrecognition increases the farther the group positions itself from the mainstream. In particular, when a subculture, such as that of youth activism, is explicitly concerned with issues of economic and social inequality, the manner in which its members reproduce aspects of these very inequalities become particularly mystified. One way in which this happens is through the enactment of what Julie Bettie (2003) calls ‘class performances.’ Bettie coined the term ‘class performance’ to highlight the ways in which one’s class of origin does not always neatly coincide with the class location that one represents to the world. She thus makes an important connection to the cultural enactment of class, noting that, while such cultural performances are most often linked to one’s habitus (and thus one’s unconscious enactment of class), the possibility of a “class performance” explains what happens when one’s class enactment is not directly mappable onto one’s habitus (cf. p 51). Bettie’s concept of ‘class performances’ begins to nuance Thornton’s subcultural capital, in that it permits the possibility of enacting a class behaviour that does not match one’s class origins, without losing sight of the delimiting nature of class histories.

What forms, then, of subcultural capital are most desirable within youth activist communities? As discussed briefly in Chapter 2, I have come to understand the predominant type of class performance that accrues the most subcultural capital within youth activist communities as a complex form of working class/middle class performance, or what I have called more
simply ‘performing grunge.’ This performance has attained a specific cultural code also known as being ‘radical.’ While such a performance is certainly not ubiquitous, nor entirely determining of who becomes involved in these communities, the idea of being ‘radical’ emerged often enough in interviews and field work that I think it can best be understood as a specific cultural script, the articulation of which points to some hidden (or not-so-hidden) class harms experienced by a number of research participants. Although this performance generally emerged along class lines, it had specific implications for those participants who were from racialized communities as well. This was due, in part, to the inextricable relationship between class and ‘race’ within Canada, and also due to the fact of the normative (read: white) Canadian citizen against which all young people are expected to measure themselves (as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5).

6.2.2 Acquiring an activist habitus: the role of families of origin

As noted in Chapter 3, the majority of participants within this research project were raised by middle class families. This middle class history was moderated by another important factor in the context of the research; that is, participants were remarkable for being largely from Left-leaning,47 if not outright activist, families. Of the 33 participants for whom I have data (because of the semi-structured nature of the interviews, we didn’t always cover the topic of parental political beliefs), 15 identified that their parents were either activists themselves, or highly engaged in Lefty political practices (for example, campaigned for the politically Left-leaning New Democratic Party). Another 12 identified their parents as supportive of their activist work, and generally in agreement with their Left-leaning views, even if they were not themselves

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47 By ‘Left-leaning’ here, I mean the constellation of political practices and beliefs that are generally associated with the political Left in Canada. These generally include being supportive of unions, critical of the erosion of the social safety net, opposed to war, supportive of same-sex rights and abortion, and pro-environment.
actively engaged in organizing. Three saw their parents as supportive of their activist work, even though they did not share the same political values. Only three remarked that their parents were entirely unsupportive of their activist work, largely because their political values were in conflict with those of their children.

In keeping with Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus*, the implications for young people of coming from middle class activist and/or Lefty families was that they had first-hand experience of the largely middle class *field* of activism. Many spoke of attending their first protest when they were children, on the shoulders of parents who were demonstrating against nuclear facilities, the first Iraq war, or other social issues of their generation. This played an important role in the activism of those people whose parents were so involved. As Zoe (age 22) remarked about the influence of her parents’ activism on her own political practices:

Oh hugely, because I think it endowed me with an ability to talk about politics, and an interest in talking about politics. More than just politics, because of all the connotations of that, is like a sense of justice. My dad and my mum both have a really deep sense of justice. Whether I agree with it all the time or not, but my dad was actually the only man still that I have ever met that was so sensitive about war that he would freely cry talking about war any time. So yeah, that was really powerful for me as a kid.

Likewise, Carolyn (age 20) noted the following about her family:

Carolyn: So everyone’s—everyone’s really socially involved so it’s—you know an interesting dynamic to come from ‘cause in some ways it feels like there’s so much support behind it. In some ways it kind of feels like I’m the, like, last one that’s sort of coming along you know.

Jackie: Right, right.

Carolyn: [I] couldn’t be anything but an activist. It’s just sort of expected. You know it’s a phenomenal family to grow up in.

Returning to Bourdieu’s notion of the *habitus*, and the role it plays in structuring people’s process of seeking out a *field* that matches their own sensibilities and experiences, we can begin
to see how the experience of growing up in a home that explicitly focused on social justice concerns could both predispose a person to seeking out such social spaces, as well as provide them with the dispositions that would make accommodation within these spaces a relatively straightforward task. Such homes almost exclusively belonged to participants who were both white and middle class, structuring the forms of access that could be negotiated to the activist ‘habitus’ that made a sense of belonging within the activist field more easily attainable.

Particularly noteworthy was that those who came from activist families were much more likely to be involved at a younger age, and to have achieved leadership positions within activist groups.

I had the opportunity to observe a snippet of the early socialization process that could contribute to the development of such a habitus, a process that may have been similar to that experienced by some of the participants in this research. While I was in the midst of an interview at the home of Diana (age 22), we were interrupted by her roommate’s four-year-old daughter, who was trying to avoid going to daycare. She came into the living room where we were seated with a doll in hand, a sort of Barbie doll fairy, in order to show it to us. While admiring the toy, Diana asked the child, Jillian, if she remembered what they had been speaking of about this particular toy earlier: “There was some reason we don’t like this dolly, right?” Diana asked her. Jillian looked up at us sideways, toy clutched in one hand. “Yes…,” she said hesitantly, “because it’s Disney.” “And why don’t we like Disney?” Diana asked her. Jillian shook her head, looking perplexed. “Because they use child labour, remember?” Diana prompted her. Jillian continued to look confused: “What’s child labour?” she asked. At this point her harried mom, also a social activist, came down the stairs calling for Jillian to get her boots on and get on the road to daycare. “Ask your mom on your way to daycare,” Diana urged her. As Jillian and her mom left the room, we heard Jillian ask, “Mommy, what’s child labour?”
Such experiences do not, of course, capture all of the childhoods of the participants in this project. Participants whose families may have been broadly supportive but were not, themselves, activists or Left-leaning found themselves needing to negotiate the ‘lack-of-fit’ that existed between their habitus and the field of activism. Conrad (age 25), who came from an Indo-Canadian family without a history of Canadian activism, relates an amusing story that poignantly illustrates the difference in habitus acquired by he and his siblings to that which Jillian is being exposed to:

My younger brothers and sisters, like they’re all kind of aware of it, but again, like they challenge it in kind of funny ways. Like my brother went to England, and he got me like this Che Guevara t-shirt, right? Cause I always liked Rage Against the Machine, and Rage Against the Machine always had this stuff. And then, he got me like a bottle of rum another time, and I was like it’s Che rum, I was like, ok, this is totally against what he stands for, right? But that’s my brother giving me a gift, right? And then like a couple of years later, my sister got me for my birthday a Che Guevara t-shirt, and I was like, you guys don’t really understand. But then that’s my brother and sister, they’re going to be supportive of it in some ways. And my mom and dad, though, they’re just like whatever, right? There’s, in the community, in the Indo-Canadian community, even in our family, there’s an understanding of the importance of politics, of democracy, and things like that, but um it’s always an understanding of it at the party level, right? There’s an awareness of NDP, Liberal, what are you, I’m not Liberal, but in terms of political philosophy and believing any of that stuff, not really (Conrad, age 25).

Conrad’s experience, as relayed here, helps to illustrate the complex and deeply symbolic ways in which one’s family background can contribute to a sense of belonging – or exclusion -- within activist life worlds. That such an activist habitus was almost exclusively affiliated with a specific class history (that is, middle class) meant that only some young people could access the subcultural community of youth activism via this route. Given the general cultural sanction against taking up forms of citizenship that challenge the state – such as the activities of many of the activists within this project – the structuring nature of the class-based activist habitus effectively delimits who might take up the political location of the ‘activist.’
6.2.3 ‘Race’ and the activist habitus

Conrad’s story highlights another complicating aspect of youth activist identity within the contemporary Canadian nation-state; that is, the role of ‘race’ or ethnicity. Just as in many aspects of Canadian society, the existence of racism within activist circles is a hotly debated topic. Specifically, there have been many articles, conversations, and Internet discussions about whether activist communities are racist (see, for example, Numerous authors, 2003). While these debates have been important ones, and the issues they raise continue to require attention, the basis of analysis that I am using here, following Julie Bettie, sees class and ‘race’ as very difficult to extricate, particularly in a country such as Canada with its specific legacies of colonialism and racist migration policies. As noted in Chapters 4 and 5, the idea of the ‘good citizen’ has long been associated with an imaginary of white, middle classness. Additionally, middle class cultures that can easily accommodate an activist habitus remain largely white. Thus I am trying to make the more complex argument that activist cultures within Canada, immured as they are within a middle class doxa, unintentionally reproduce class practices that serve to exclude people who have not been exposed to the ‘common sense’ values of that specific (often white) classed ‘structure of feeling’ about activism. In this way, while many visible minority young people find their way into activist cultures, many of them also experience the sense of ‘not quite fitting’ that means their interactions within activist cultures are always somewhat uneasy.

Noteworthy here is that the ‘whiteness’ of activist cultures was often commented upon by both white activists and activists of colour, while its middle classness went largely unremarked upon. For example, Diane, a white participant, relayed a joke to me:

Question: How do you know if you’re an anarchist?
Answer: All your clothes are black and all your friends are white.
Likewise, two women of colour, Angelina and Farah, remarked upon the whiteness of activist cultures (Farah was one of the few to explicitly identify them as largely middle class as well). There are some obvious reasons for this. First of all, ‘whiteness’ is more easily observed than ‘middle classness,’ especially with the prevalence of working class performances – what I have called ‘performing grunge’ -- within activist cultures (described further below). But there is another way in which class has become invisible, unique to places such as Canada and the U.S. with their rhetoric of meritocracy and liberal equality: that is, class and ‘race’ have come to be conflated in ways that render class invisible. Bettie (2003) noted that girls in a rural California high school often deny class as a way to protect themselves against class harms and in response to feelings of shame. In many ways, ‘race’ has become the new class, standing in for concerns about equity and access to resources. The problem here is that it can never be ‘race’ alone as a singular category that structures such access, although it certainly plays a powerful role in a white-dominant country such as Canada. But when ‘race’ signifies inequality as the superordinate category it can serve to obscure the important role of class in structuring youth activist subcultures.

Just as was true for white participants, almost all of the participants of colour that I interviewed came from middle or upper middle class histories. While constantly facing the wider politics of ‘race’ in urban Canada, I would suggest that their class markers provided them, to a certain degree, with the forms of cultural capital that permitted them to better navigate youth activist subcultures. Nonetheless their ‘race’/ethnicity also played an important role in preventing them from feeling as if they quite ‘fit.’ I understand this as linked to my description of the activist family habitus above, and the specific way in which visible minority activists often had to navigate between a family culture that did not always coincide with their activist involvement.
This was perhaps exacerbated by a more general experience of needing to navigate Canadian norms by families raised within countries with quite different traditions. This experience, as relayed by participants through interviews, often manifested in a need to negotiate between their own family culture, including its values and beliefs, and that of activist subcultures, in a manner which sometimes left them feeling that they must pit one against the other. As Sanna (age 19) noted:

I think I connect more with people in a space like [a class on community activism], or you know, a political or organizing space that are around my age, or that are even not my age, than I do in a Muslim context where they’re my age. There are definitely things that we connect with, but even though my religion is so important for me, it’s harder for me to reconcile political and unpolitical, than Muslim and not Muslim.

Will (age 23) made a similar comment:

I don’t feel like I belong to the Markham community, that’s for sure. … At the same time it’s very interesting because it’s got a huge minority population. Lots of Chinese in Markham as well as South Asian population. … So. In terms of racial, like ethnic identity I don’t even feel connected with the Chinese people in Markham because a lot of them are, are very new, are very wealthy and don’t hold the same values as I do… My, you know, my Chinese language isn’t, it’s not there yet. It’s not as strong. And it’s kind of, it is a weird kind of in-between, right? Because, and I’m not saying it has to be this like, but like, I don’t know. It’s a really odd spot to be in [laughs]. And, yeah. And in terms of a greater identity I, I find it more easily, more easy to relate to, I guess in the end the activist circle and the people that I do work with just because values are very, like, they’re very important.

This experience of internal conflict and of needing to ‘choose’ between loyalty to home and family or compliance with activist norms and values, highlights again the ‘lack of fit’ between *habitus* and *field*. Although these participants share a similar class location as many of their activist peers – Sanna’s father is an Imam and her mother is a teacher, and she grew up in a comfortable family home within the suburbs of Vancouver, whereas Will’s father is an accountant, and his mother is university-educated and has worked in a variety of middle class
occupations – their families do not share the Canadian activist *habitus* that would allow Sanna and Will to ‘belong’ within Canadian youth activist subcultures without the possibility of betraying their family of origin. Sanna makes this fear explicit when she states:

> [It’s] been really tough, like trying to convince [them] that it’s okay, convince my parents that there is a lot of fluidity to that [activist] identity, and that you can negotiate different circles, and yeah, they’re on some level a bit uncomfortable with me getting too involved in thinking that, that, you know, that’s gonna be like, they’re losing me to a society that they’re not totally comfortable with.

Another way in which class is interconnected with ‘race’ in the cases above is a recent history of migration and what this means for their class experiences and aspirations. Although Will’s and Sanna’s families had managed to find a place within the opportunity structures of Canada – partially due in each case to significant economic and cultural capital in their respective countries of birth – they were each haunted by the spectres of economic failure and social exclusion for their children. Will notes that his parents are not thrilled with his political work, and that they continue to hold out hopes that he will become a doctor – “the Chinese dream,” as he calls it. Sanna’s parents are worried that she will abandon values or perspectives that they hold dear.

Although the examples I have drawn from the stories of Sanna, Will and Conrad were consistent with the stories of some of the other participants of colour, it is important to note that there were exceptions to this experience. These differences highlight that the experiences above were not always structured along the lines of ‘race,’ and reinforces the importance of an intersecting analysis that considers both ‘race’ and class, as well as the specific development of a family *habitus* of activism. For example, Rajinder (age 13) was born in Canada but his parents had moved here from India and Malaysia; both of his parents were highly involved within activist communities, opening opportunities for Rajinder to also become so engaged. By the time I met him at the age of 13, Rajinder was chairing meetings, had his own radio show, and was an
active and vocal member of a number of activist organizations. Rajinder was a remarkably articulate young man, and had a strong grasp of many of the theoretical arguments that structured activist organizing; he could fluently cite Noam Chomsky, Gandhi, and Malcolm X, for example. Noteworthy was that he did not attribute his involvement in activist worlds to his parents’ involvement at all, feeling that he had been the one to express initial interest, and they had simply supported him in this. However, in observing him and his mother co-chair a meeting, it quickly became apparent to me that Rajinder did not stumble upon activist cultures in isolation from a wider family concern for social justice and activist engagement. Thus, although Rajinder’s family migrated to Canada and likely shared many of the class-based concerns that such a transition incurs, their own involvement and passion for social justice issues created a family habitus that permitted Rajinder to take up and expand those analyses within his own activist practices at a remarkably young age.

The experience of needing to negotiate between a ‘home culture’ that does not understand or value activism in the way that the home cultures of some of their peers do means that young people like Conrad, Sanna and Will faced additional barriers to participating in activist subcultures. That such home cultures were often – although certainly not always – associated with a specific white ethnicity that was tightly linked to middle class Canadian activist cultures meant that the experience of being ‘outside’ easily took on racialized overtones. However, I wish to suggest here that understanding the acquisition of subcultural capital associated with activism through Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus -- its theoretical utility being, among other things, that it can incorporate both class and ‘race’/ethnicity -- carries a stronger explanatory power than any single-faceted analysis might offer. Further, when taking into consideration the fact that young people are negotiating access to activist subcultures within a
wider cultural realm that vilifies these forms of citizenship participation (as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5), it can become particularly difficult for young people from outside of activist or Left-leaning families to become engaged in activist subcultures. These barriers are experienced, not through outright conflicts that involve racial slurs, nor through any intentional process of exclusion, but through the subtle sense of belonging that marks one, as Bourdieu argues, as either in place or out of place.

6.2.4 ‘Performing grunge’

The prevalence of middle class family histories amongst young activists plays a peculiar role within Canadian youth activist subcultures. This is because, as I suggested in Chapter 2, the means by which young activists acquire the most subcultural capital within activist circles is to carry out a working class performance, one which often belies their own middle class histories. As Andrew (age 28) notes:

I think some people try to deny their, when they become radical politically they try to deny that they’re middle class or that they came from that kind of background. And they go to sort of weird lengths. Like maybe they intentionally work at a lower-paying job or dress poor. Like, I find that really ridiculous. People who, middle class people who have to dress poor. Maybe that’s the fashion in certain circles, but, to me it’s like kind of dishonest or whatever. I am relatively broke now because I spend a lot of time on activism or because I’m at school now. But I think to try to put myself on par with someone who actually grew up poor or like, I still have the security of coming from a middle class family and you have all of that I guess it’s like self-confidence. You have that to fall back on.

Farah (age 27), one of the few participants who came from a politically active working class immigrant family, reflects on the contradictions she experienced within activist circles, especially once she took a paid position in an activist organization:
Farah: But when you’re on salary and you’re doing organizing – it just changes everything. You know?

Jackie: How does it change it?

Farah: I don't know like I, philosophically I have not been able to wrap my head around it. I’m still like in the early stages of - of trying to figure it out. I’ve had good conversations with people about it. And feel better about it for a little while, but it never lasts. Um, I guess activism for me was - was about sacrificing. It was about being ah, like being on welfare as - as much of like a - a contradiction and this may sound like it. It was – it was a way of dropping out of - of the society to do – to be able to do something that no one else would pay you for, or no one else would value right? And there was sort of like this, like this self righteousness in it and there was sort of this - this ah – this like downward mobile bullshit about it too. But whatever it was, it was kind of where I come from especially like organizing mostly in like white – white culture or punk rock activism – you know where most are middle class and white and - and go on welfare to organize or whatever so you know?

Farah’s experience of activism, with its expectations of personal sacrifice and its emphasis on downward mobility, were echoed by Karen (age 27), herself from a white working class history:

I mean I think that it’s like, you know, [laughs] I feel like this pressure to live without comforts, think that comforts are things like, I mean, I think that activism taught me to appreciate really simple things, which is great. Which is really important to, like, unhook yourself from the cycle of material culture and accumulation that is North America. But it’s like, you know, I’m like toast and tea for breakfast, supper and dinner does not a sustaining diet make [laughs]. It was just like, you know, everything that you wear has to be free or second hand, you know, you could never own a house because like ownership, property is theft. You know, everything in your life needs to be really difficult [laughs]. And, and joy can only come from like really, really like simple, free things.

Karen goes on to describe her own struggle with these expectations and what they meant for her lifestyle and personal choices, particularly when they clashed with the doxa of the youth activist subcultures of which she was a part:

These expectations that the domestic is really base, I found kind of, sometimes difficult. Because at the end of the day I was like, I just want a home. Like, not to buy a home, but I was like, I just want a home. I just don’t want a punk rock crash pad any more. You know what I mean? I don’t know. Who’s that person on the couch? Don’t know. [laughter] I’d like to know. Would like my house not to be falling apart all around me and have a slumlord and you know, if that means
paying more than $200 a month for rent that’s going to have to happen. And I think that there was always like also a set kind of prescribed group of things that you could do as recreation like, it was like, hiking okay. You know, riding your, your free bike, okay. Going to protests, okay. And, I mean, going to see [punk rock band] Submission Hole, okay. Like, these are like the four things that you can do. [laughing]

The pressures and expectations as described above by various participants were often bewildering, and, as Farah suggests (“philosophically I have not been able to wrap my head around it”), participants were often at a loss to explain why these rules existed, other than through a general recourse to anti-consumerism. While anti-consumerism as a political position may be one aspect of these subcultural forces, I suggest that Bettie’s concept of class performance is a theoretical tool that can perhaps offer new insights into this phenomenon.

As previously described, Bettie understands the ‘class performance’ as one way to explain how people from one class of origin might ‘perform’ a different class culture. Whereas in her work she focuses mostly on ‘middle class performers’ – those working class young people who could disguise their class history by mobilizing middle class symbols such as success in school – in the case of my study it tended to be middle class young people taking on a working class identity, or ‘performing grunge,’ as I have called it. The accounts above offer a glimpse into what shape these subcultural pressures take for young people involved in activist worlds. The belief that one must live without material comforts, and that in order to be a good activist one must make ‘sacrifices,’ is part of a constellation of expectations that mark whether one ‘belongs’ within activist cultures. It also, as noted above, sits in interesting contrast to the larger cultural pressures to consume, whereby the activist subcultural stance against consumption becomes its own form of revolt. While the cycles of consumption within Canada may well be a pressing political issue, the problem with ‘performing grunge’ is that it succeeds in returning the
meaning of activism relentlessly and repeatedly to one’s personal identity. The way in which one situates oneself within the internal power relations of activist cultures marks how well one has absorbed the unspoken cultural norms that allow one to ‘belong’ or not. What this does is conflate the notion of social change and social movements with a misconceived emphasis on one’s personal attributes – a regime of emphasis that is easily reconciled within a neoliberal ideological space that asks the subject to be forever self-perfecting. That the forms of self-perfection that young activists take up have more to do with downward mobility than competing in a global economy does little to reduce the class and ‘race’ harms that such performances accru.

The array of symbolic markers that I have identified as ‘performing grunge,’ or enacting a working class performance, can be particularly bewildering for people who come from working class or working poor backgrounds trying to penetrate activist lifeworlds. Luisa (age 20) related a story of being questioned by a fellow activist for working part-time at McDonald’s (which is not considered an appropriate job within activist circles, in spite of its low wage). This person expressed disbelief that Luisa could be working within the anti-corporate activist milieu and still be employed at such a symbol of multinational corporatism. Luisa, however, saw it as a necessary job to help out her family, who had recently migrated from Latin America, and were faced with the challenges of establishing a stable income to support her and her siblings (note here again the elision between class, ethnicity, and histories of migration). Karen (age 27), who

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48 In a recent (2004) popular book entitled Rebel Sell: why the culture can’t be jammed, Canadian academics Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter identify some similar themes to those I have noted within this chapter, naming the group and their actions ‘counter-culture rebels’, and chastising them for their political futility. However, unlike Heath and Potter, my argument is that class, race, and histories of liberalism/neoliberalism cannot be separated from an analysis of why some young people take up activist practices and others do not. Rather than incorporating a cultural and sociological analysis into their assessment, Heath and Potter simply rebuke young people for being so politically foolish (particularly irksome to me is that they invoke Bourdieu’s (1984) pivotal work, Distinction, as part of their explanatory regime, without incorporating any reference to the impacts of class! The irony of this is that Distinction is all about class and its role in structuring tastes and preferences).
describes her family as “every day they’re just gripping, just just above the poverty line, like their necks sticking out,” offers the following story:

You know, it’s like really funny, like [name of friend], for example, we have a lot, we agree on a lot of different things, and have some sort of similar politics and friends and like that, but I remember she was like “we always had books in the house,” I really remember, she was like “we always had books in the house. And whenever we were out and we wanted a book, our parents would never deny it to us,” and kind of thing? And I was like I think we had this thing, and she was like, “it wouldn’t matter, I would never be denied books.” I was like “well, we couldn’t afford books.” She was like, “no, we just wouldn’t be denied.” And it was like, yep, no. And it was kind of this weird thing too, she was kind of like making this value judgment? And I was like “food, books” (weighing each), and we went with food. It was kind of really – and I um yah, so I don’t feel like, because I’ve been occupying this space, I don’t feel like I can be totally open with those things? Like you know what I mean you’re just like, well, it’s not gonna come up, and I’m not gonna bring it up, because it’s not, I just don’t think people would understand. Some people get overwhelmed by it. But I think that that’s sort of like a general disconnect, I wouldn’t say it happens all the time, it certainly, like with some of my really close friends it’s not an issue, but I think with like, in your like public kind of persona, that’s when it comes down to it.

As Karen notes, a common strategy for navigating the class harms encountered in the middle class world of activism was to “not…bring it up,” where “it” becomes one’s own history of poverty or struggle. Ironically, while middle class people are busily disguising their middle classness, those from lower SES backgrounds may also be involved in similar processes, the result being that nobody is able to “be totally open about things.” In talking to another activist about this phenomenon, himself from a working class background, he suggested that middle class people may sometimes feel self-conscious about their class backgrounds, and thus treat others with derision. He notes the subcultural capital that has come to be associated with this sort of working class performance, linking it to activists being concerned with the question of “who is the most radical?” (Jean-Paul, field notes, Jan 3rd, 2007). Being ‘radical’ is precisely the status that is most highly prized within youth activist subcultures, and its acquisition comes only to
those capable of mobilizing the complex set of cultural resources that mark one as ‘in the know’ (Thornton, 1996) within youth activist subcultures. While Jean-Paul attributes the anxiety about being ‘radical’ to ‘self-consciousness’ and an accompanying sense of insecurity on an individual level, I am more interested in what this widespread phenomenon means on a more cultural-sociological level; that is, I want to ask what purposes does it serve, and what can it tell us about the complex relationship between class and young people’s participation in activist cultures within the contemporary nation-state? I investigate these questions further below.

### 6.3 Regimes of symbolic authorization: consumption, activism, identity

Thus far the chapter has sketched the contexts of liberalism and neoliberalism and their impact on young people’s structures of feeling within activist circles, and outlined the intersecting influences of ‘race’ and class. It has also described a particular class performance that I call ‘performing grunge’ amongst youth activist communities. This fourth and final section shall consider the implications of these particular contexts for those who are granted the right to participate within youth activist subcultures, and those who, on the other hand, may feel like outsiders to the practices they seek to deploy. To make sense of this phenomenon from within a cultural sociological framework, I use Bourdieu’s notion of *authorized language*.

Bourdieu describes *authorized language* as the means within stratified societies whereby particular actions become imbued with particular meanings because of the differing regimes of legitimation that are attached. In *Language and Symbolic Power*, he notes that “a performative utterance is destined to fail each time that it is not pronounced by a person who has the ‘power’ to pronounce it, or, more generally, each time that the ‘particular persons and circumstances in a given case’ are not ‘appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked’” (1991, p.
Authorized language is closely connected to cultural capital, whereby it is those with the appropriate cultural capital within the appropriate context whose utterances are given greater legitimacy. Authorized language is primarily cultural, in that its authority is derived from cultural and historical discourses that offer it legitimacy while simultaneously masking its embeddedness within regimes of inequality.

The ways in which authorized language plays out within activist subcultures is two-fold. On the one hand, as described above, the majority of youth activism within Canada is carried out by middle class young people on behalf of those without such cultural capital. The discomfort that many young people feel with this dynamic was articulated by Tracey (age 29):

Tracey: It’s exactly like for instance if I’m a person who’s going in to collect my welfare cheque and they won’t give it to me and I make a scene in the office—am I an activist? Or am I just getting my cheque? You know like, whereas you know I turn up and I’m like: give her her cheque you know, I’m not leaving your office. Have I helped? Yeah I have but it’s, tomorrow I don’t feel like showing up. You know it’s kind of like really external and not that I, like, you know -- and believe me I’m all for showing up at the welfare offices. I have like no, no qualms of doing that but I’m just always conscious of the fact that I’m like—I could leave. But you know it’s just like I’m like, this is so difficult, like it’s so difficult coming from places like, like I embarrassingly put myself [in the focus group drawing] kind of close to the outside edge of, close to the state because—as much as I’m constantly like anti-state, anti-state, anti-nation, if I changed my mind tomorrow I could go and integrate fairly well, you know, like in that I’ve got the education, I’ve got the background and I’ve got all of the things that would allow me to move into this kind of outer sphere. And—I of course choose not to. And—I more than choose not to—I’m actively involved in trying to undo these things. But—you know you can never work that quite out like you have this—like when you have that possibility it’s just kind of, I really struggle with how best to be an ally you know and how best to undo what privilege I’ve got.

Tracey here highlights an important element of the forms of authorized language carried by young people engaged in certain forms of activist work in Canada, whereby they can opt to make use of their privilege in the world to enact change. Indeed, this is often a conscious strategy used by activist groups – for example, Canadians accompanying people in other countries who might
be the target of state violence (such as union organizers or human rights workers). The elements of symbolic authorization that young people embody and perform in activist circles are often inseparable from the kinds of work that Canadian activists do – and likewise often inseparable from the middle classness of the activists themselves, granting them the symbolic authority that they strategically draw upon. It is important to note that this is a context unique to only particular forms of activism – the activism that originates within communities that have been impacted takes a completely different shape (for example, Aboriginal communities setting up road blockades in support of land claims disputes). The popular idea of ‘the activist’ within the Canadian imaginary, I would suggest however, is the one who is acting on behalf of others, a legacy that has much to do with liberal individualism, Victorian era codes of charity, and the class heritage that supports these forms of activist practice. That this remains the dominant manner in which activism is understood and enacted was constantly being negotiated by the participants within this research.

This wider context of authorized language is not the only one within activist subcultures. Used less consciously and strategically, and inseparable from the middle class culture that dominates youth activism, there is also an authorized language of the subculture itself, which incorporates the rules of comportment and demeanour that are policed, in a variety of ways, by the subcultural members. Ironically, given the emphasis on resisting North American consumption practices described above, the ways in which the symbolic authority of particular actors is reinforced is through specific consumption practices, as well as accompanying sets of beliefs and experiences. Conrad identifies some of the salient rules of comportment and consumption in the following excerpt:

One was like this identity thing where, on the one hand, I’m not like everybody else around me in these groups, and two, it’s like, they’re living this radicalism
that I sort of, I’m not there, on that level, right? I’m not a vegetarian, I’m not um, like, I drive my car, right? How do I resolve that conflict in myself, I still have it right? But it’s just like I can’t do anything in Richmond, I’ve always hated that part of Richmond, like I always wish I could be in Vancouver, but then there’s family responsibilities to help out there, and I can’t, it’s just a luxury often times, I think, that you have right? That’s why I’m always like, if I didn’t have a car, I wouldn’t be able to go to these meetings, or these things at the art gallery, rallies or whatever. (Conrad, age 25)

Rose sees consumption practices as becoming increasingly inseparable from the idea of the ‘active citizen’ beginning in the 1980s. These ‘active citizens’ were not expected to be active in the sense of participating within a political public sphere, but, rather, were to become ‘active’ in their own self-regulation, “seeking to enhance and capitalize on existence itself through calculated acts and investments” (Rose, 1999, p. 164). He notes that these new ‘active citizens’ were located within a cultural field marked by the: proliferation of new apparatuses, devices and mechanisms for the government of conduct and forms of life: new forms of consumption, a public habitat of images, the regulation of habits, dispositions, styles of existence in the name of identity and lifestyle. In this new field, the citizen is to become a consumer, and his or her activity is to be understood in terms of the activation of the rights of the consumer in the marketplace (Rose, 1992, pp. 164-165).

I see this as one manner in which liberalism and, more relevantly, neoliberalism has penetrated youth activist subcultures: consumption practices, and what they mean for rituals of style and struggles for belonging cannot be separated from the forms of ‘active citizenship’ identified by Rose as becoming increasingly about one’s identity as a consumer.

The links between activist identity, lifestyle, and consumption practices were strongly marked throughout my year of fieldwork. Not only did we discuss these issues during the interviews, but the impact of youth activist cultures noticeably permeated my own behaviour within the field, shaping everything from the clothes I wore to the topics I would speak about.
outside of the more formal context of the interviews and focus groups. Such rules of comportment are common across all fields, as Bourdieu would suggest, although of course the specific rules change. My consciousness about my appearance was not particularly different than it is when I am in different settings (at an academic conference, say), but the specific items I chose to represent myself attempted to follow the subcultural rules of activist cultures, as I understood them. That such comportment might be important was noted by people other than myself; while staying at a friend’s place in Montreal during my fieldwork, she commented that the outfit I was wearing that day was “perfect for doing interviews with activists” – I was wearing cargo-style pants, a long-sleeved shirt covered over with a short-sleeved t-shirt that had an image of ‘Serpentina’ on the front, a sort of carnivalesque cartoon of a woman with a snake wrapped around her neck (field notes, November 10, 2006).

The experiences of self-regulation and disciplining by others to ensure compliance with specific consumption practices and behaviours was described by many of the research participants. For example, Suzie spoke of feeling ‘vegan policed,’ and being terrified to host meetings at her home for fear of providing the wrong food. Diane described such activist ‘creds’ as how many times you have been arrested, and for how long; “You have to look a certain way; you have to know certain people,” she noted. The particular ‘look’ that young people need to have in order to ‘fit’ within activist subcultures was described by various people to include wearing used clothing, dressing in black, wearing political t-shirts, wearing sweatshop-free products, and just generally not looking ‘mainstream’:

Jackie: What was the dress code?
Phillipe: You know. Like, nothing fashionable.
Jackie: Right.
Phillipe: You buy stuff like second-hand.
Jackie: Second-hand right.
Phillipe: Yeah like—wool sweaters and non-conventional pants.
Jackie: No brand names?
Phillipe: No brand names no.
Jackie: No brand names.
Phillipe: No brand names at all. No logo. (laughing)
Jackie: Right. No logo of course.
Phillipe: I still kind of do that. It’s not like my social group commands—
demands me to do it but still. If I was to come with a Nike cap to a meeting of
[organization he is involved with] I don't think people would like it a lot
(laughing).

From another participant:
Angelina: Shirts – tee shirts that have a message that is activist or political. Um,
like you wouldn’t dress in a way that’s very mainstream.
Jackie: Hm, uh hm.
Angelina: Ah I didn’t – I think there’s different ways of of showing that or
whatever. But it wouldn’t be whatever the stereotypical like mainstream is. The
way to dress – you wouldn’t dress like that. Like you know try and you know like
products that are sweat[shop] free or whatever.

And from another:
Karen: [I was involved with] this workers’ collective that was going to transform
the world and you know, um. And so it was a lot of like socialists kind of
anarchists, Marxists, kind of people that I was hanging out with, which was a
fabulous education experience for me. But it was a really big clique. … But it just
also felt, and sometimes I just felt really small. Like it was like a really like punk
rock identified. Always dressing in black, riding your bike everywhere kind of
little circle.

Along with perceived rules of apparel, many participants commented that they felt there were a
set of political beliefs and ideals that needed to be followed:
Daniel: Right, so, yes, there’s definitely a sense of like expectations that if you believe this, therefore you believe that, and I feel that in many ways I don’t like this, you know, that it’s very much a herd mentality that causes people to go along with, with say like the Bush administration and causes people to support the war in Iraq, and causes people to just be very, you know, and the patriotism now that’s going on in the United States is totally like a mass mentality, and there’s a sense of not thinking for yourself, and just following, you know? But then on the Left, on the anti-establishment, there’s the exact same mindset. They’re following different, like people who consider themselves non-conformist are very often just conforming to a different set of ideals.

From Angelina:

Angelina: Like there’s a certain like political assumptions that kind of like fit together.

Jackie: Uh hm.

Angelina: Like what um like pro-Palestine – like um anti-neoliberalism or something, which I totally agree with (laughing).

Taken together, this package of beliefs, consumption practices, and apparel serves to constitute a particular type of both recognizable and legitimate ‘insider identity,’ one that provides the familiar legitimacy of group membership, and carries a set of inherited codes of insider status with an associated sense of belonging. Conrad (age 25) described the youth activist identity as follows:

It’s political, right? Always. And, that’s the box though, is that it’s about rallies, protests, and like your complete refusal of things. That’s why I have a hard time accepting it, because my youth activist [identity], is like those people that are in those [protests] that I go to, or I have a meeting with them all the time, so yeah, I guess I am, but I don’t look like that, I’m not dressing like that, I’m not there, I have my car, all those things. So it is this total identity. And not just like what you’re doing. Right?
The implications of this code of beliefs, consumption practices and style were that people that were unable to fulfill such requirements maintained ‘structures of feeling’ that played against their feelings of inclusion and recognition within the youth activist subcultures:

Angelina: Um, I would say yeah like I - I would say that it has impacted it in that I worried I wouldn’t fit or something.

Jackie: Uh hm.

Angelina: Or like um, which is stupid ‘cause it shouldn’t really matter like what you know … And that if I don’t look exactly [like] they are or whatever – or if I don’t believe in all those things that, like, what does that mean? I don't know. Yeah. Like when I was at the anti-imperialist march and there’s people at McGill, like, I recognize who are, I’m friends with or whatever.

Jackie: Uh hm.

Angelina: And then – but then it’s like especially like just activists – I’m like, there should be more people here than just – how many people like imperialism (laughing)?

Jackie: Yeah.

Angelina: You know? Why aren’t there more people out?

Jackie: Right.

Angelina: I don't know.

Jackie: Right.

Angelina: It’s just like you can’t – it’s like you only march if you’re part of the activist community and otherwise you just stay away even if you believe that.

What function do these unwritten ‘rules’ and deeply coded behaviors play in disciplining the participation of specific people within activist cultures? As I have already suggested, I am not attempting to argue for the potential merit or disadvantages of such behaviors within the frame of activism. Rather I am more concerned with the emphasis on *individual choice* that such subcultural rules reinforce, and how this can be understood within the high modern, neoliberal
context of the contemporary Canadian nation-state. As Hannah Arendt would suggest, when an individual’s capacity to “act” within the public sphere becomes conflated with his or her personal identity and consumer choices, the space for ethical engagement within the polity is narrowed. In other words, the political realm, what Arendt saw as the true sphere for the enactment of ‘freedom,’ is turned into the space of what she calls the ‘social,’ – that is, the space where concerns about behaviour and identity take primacy over any form of real ethical action (see Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 320). This has implications for the ways in which social change is both imagined and enacted through the activist subcultural communities themselves. As Nikolas Rose remarks,

> The problem of freedom now comes to be understood in terms of the capacity of an autonomous individual to establish an identity through shaping a meaningful everyday life. Freedom is seen as autonomy, the capacity to realize one’s desires in one’s secular life, to fulfill one’s potential through one’s own endeavours, to determine the course of one’s own existence through acts of choice (Rose, 1999, p. 84).

Similarly, Luisa, a participant in the project, remarks:

> I had a lot of friends who would do little things like ‘Oh Luisa, I thought you were into saving the world.’ You know ‘what are you doing showering twice a day, aren’t you supposed to be sustainable,’ like ‘why are you drinking coffee at Starbucks?’ And I think that comes from a very individualistic analysis of change, and that change is made on an individual level, [rather] than the collective level.

Taken together, what these remarks signify is the problematic emphasis upon individual choice as the apparent or most legitimate path to ‘freedom’ (or justice, or social change). This particular discourse, with its deep roots within traditions of liberalism, is particularly dominant in Canada, and serves to mask other aspects of activist cultures, such as the impacts of class and ‘race’ conflicts. While such specific consumer choices can, perhaps, be used as a strategy to leverage change directed at (for example) corporations (see also Edwards and Mercer, 2007), if these consumer choices begin to elide with one’s sense of identity and self-worth, then the entire
apparatus of social movements begins to shift towards a sectarianism that acts against the
impulse for broad-based change (see also Zizek, 2005). If the impetus for social change is to be
found solely within one’s personal identity and consumption choices, then arguably the
foundations for a social movement will be fragile and impermanent, leading more equivocally to
such emotions as guilt and anxiety over and above any capacity for recognizing and acting upon injustices.

6.4 Conclusions

The argument I have made throughout this chapter is that youth activist subcultures exist
within a specific, stratified cultural milieu, one which is highly permeated by histories of
liberalism and contemporary neoliberal ideologies and is equally impacted by the class and
‘race’ inequalities that exist in our wider society. The previous two chapters sought to establish
that, as seen through the ‘detour’ of the construction of the ‘good citizen,’ this is a cultural space
with a long history and a specific set of implications for young people attempting to locate
themselves within the current political milieu of the contemporary Canadian state. The impact of
this cultural milieu are felt by youth activists through a variety of means. Firstly, the claims of
liberalism about one’s individual role within and responsibility to the state was experienced by
participants as a structure of feeling marked by guilt and anxiety. Secondly, the histories of class
and ‘race’ stratification shape who has access to the specific *habitus* of activism today. Thirdly,
the effects of neoliberalism are felt through its emphasis on self-perfection and identity as
expressed through consumption practices.

It is in these ways that the efforts of young activists to work for positive social change is
undermined and complicated, in part through the very desire of individuals to *not* perpetuate the
class and ‘race’ distinctions that mark Canadian society. They do this by taking up practices that are intended to be ethical and anti-consumerist (such as dumpster-diving); however, when these practices are combined with a specific class and ‘race’ background shared by the majority of people within this subculture, the assumptions of a ‘common sense’ shared by all becomes (invisibly) laced with class and ‘race’ concerns. For example, where one’s actions or dress might suggest a lower SES (because clothing is scruffy or patched, or one is living collectively in inexpensive housing, for example), one’s academic and/or professional attainments, and the accompanying cultural capital that this accrues, marks a very specific subcultural identity that is only attainable by a limited few. If one wears only used clothing, but can cite Gramsci and Chomsky at will, where does one rest within a stratified society?

It is important to emphasize here that this manifestation is not the result of any one individual’s will; that is, this circumstance has not come about because of a few thoughtless people who have intentionally perpetuated class harms. Rather, I am trying to point to the structure of feeling that exists within youth activist subcultures, one that runs deeper than any one individual’s behaviour or influence. That is, this is a cultural phenomenon, one that has an impact on anyone who enters into youth activist subcultures. As described in various places throughout this chapter, I also played this game, even with the best of intentions not to, every time I entered into activist spaces. There are multiple times documented within interview transcripts when I found myself establishing my activist “creds” by pointing out the connections I had to people who were mentioned, or the knowledge I had about specific issues. While such a strategy could be helpful, on a methodological level, for establishing a sense of rapport and connection with my participants, often as not it could also serve to reinforce differences in our relative acquisition of (sub)cultural capital. The desire to establish my credentials was strong.
however, particularly if I was feeling insecure or anxious about whether I was myself being perceived as sufficiently ‘radical.’ Such is the way in which these structures of feeling are played out at the level of the every day – by being expressed as embodied emotions that allow us to feel, as Bourdieu puts it, whether we are “in our place.”

The point I am trying to make is that the regimes of symbolic authorization, including the practice of ‘performing grunge,’ cannot be pinned (or blamed, in other words) on specific thoughtless individuals. Indeed, to do so would be to misapprehend the very nature of this phenomenon. The point is that the subculture acts through the people who enter its space -- that is, this phenomenon is not about individual character flaws, but about a specific cultural milieu that comes with its own rules and sets of behaviours -- its doxa. My broader argument is that the specific shape that youth activist subcultures take within Canada are structured by a combination of a colonial past, a neoliberal present, and the ongoing stratifications on the basis of class (and class in its relation to ‘race’) that we currently live within.

The immediate question this raises, of course, is ‘how to change it?’ If youth activist subcultural practices are excluding individuals because of this complex enactment of a ‘working class/middle class performance’ that manifests as ‘performing grunge’ and, as I have argued above, this does not take place through any one individual’s volition but through a structure of feeling, then where do we look to challenge this process? Where, in other words, does agency lie? As Bourdieu and others who have used his work (e.g. McNay, 2000) have pointed out, understanding the durability of the habitus and the doxa that it produces highlights the sedimentation of social relations such that the potential for change can seem impossible. However, change does happen; within the context of this research project specifically, young people who were not from white, middle class activist family histories and/or did not ‘perform
grunge’ still found their way into activist cultures. In order to explain this reality, and the potential to which it points, I turn in the next chapter to an exposition of relational agency, and its relevance for youth activist cultures, and social change more broadly.
The previous chapters have been concerned with mapping the historical and cultural contexts within which youth activist subcultures exist in Canada. They have also outlined how such contexts have influenced and shaped the specific modes of operation of youth activist subcultures as an expression of social change in the contemporary Canadian nation-state. These chapters have necessarily focused on both the reproductive and regulatory aspects of culture, state, and education as they relate to young people engaging with the state, and do not address the creativity, possibility, uncertainty, and unpredictability that marks the cultural politics of youth subcultural activism.

In this final data chapter, I turn to an exploration of the cultural politics of action and agency among those who see themselves as part of youth activist subcultures. To put this differently, I wish to theorize those elements of action which some might identify as human agency. While turning toward this aim, I seek to keep in place all of the important constraints that I have identified and theorized throughout the last three chapters; that is, in turning to agency, it would be disingenuous to suggest that all of the restrictive elements I have already identified do not continue to play an important and delimiting role in the social life of young people. Nonetheless, we are, and always will be, more than the structures that shape us, even if they intervene considerably in our lives. It is my concern here to consider the ways in which young people can come to articulate and express activist identity, and ultimately to participate in specific forms of action within the public sphere, even in the face of wider social constraints, histories of liberalism and neoliberalism, moral claims and forms of surveillance about the

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49 A version of this chapter has been accepted for publication to the journal Gender and Education. Kennelly, J. Youth cultures, activism, and agency: revisiting feminist debates.
apparently good citizen, and ideological apparatuses that caution young people to behave in certain ways or pay the price. This final data chapter is thus concerned with addressing in greater detail the third and final research question noted in Chapter 1: “What are the modalities of action available to Canadian young people to permit their participation in dissident citizenship?”

In 2004, the London Feminist Salon Collective published an article in *Gender and Education* where they documented their discussion about the means and modalities of agency. Within that article, they noted their belief that agency can often be found within the experience of ‘strength in numbers’ (2004, p. 32) and collectivities; this is borne out by the data from my research. This is the aspect of agency that I develop in the pages to follow, a concept that I have termed *relational agency*. As discussed within Chapter 2 and further elaborated below, I situate this approach to understanding agency within the theoretical lineage of feminist political philosophy, beginning with the longstanding and sometimes bitter debates between Judith Butler and Seyla Benhabib about the origins of agency (see Benhabib *et al.*, 1995). This debate has more recently been taken up by Lois McNay (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2004) and Terry Lovell (2000, 2003), each of whom have attempted to move beyond the impasse that emerged between Butler and Benhabib by drawing upon other theoretical tools, including most prominently those of Pierre Bourdieu. Although I suggest that relationships, and the interactional structures that sustain them, are one essential component to political agency (or the capacity to take action within the public sphere), Bourdieu’s conceptual frame can help to explain how this occurs from within a specific set of social interactions. That is, the interconnections between Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus*, *cultural capital* and *field* are an essential aspect of any attempt to theorize agency.50

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50 In discussing Bourdieu’s conception of the relationship between structure and agency, Loïc Wacquant (2005c) notes that “agency itself is socially structured: the acts of classification that guide the choices of individuals are
In the pages that follow, I will outline the theoretical components that make up my intervention within this dialogue, beginning with a discussion of feminist philosophers’ approaches, then describing my own contribution to this field. I then turn to the data in order to illustrate the micro-sociological configurations of these theoretical constructs.

7.1 Feminist debates and the relational basis of agency

A long-standing and lengthy debate about the theoretical basis for agency has emerged amongst feminist political philosophers since the mid-1990s; such a debate may have found its natural location amongst feminists because of their (our) explicit concern with social emancipation (Cornell, 1995; London Feminist Salon Collective, 2004). Some of the key exchanges in the debate can be found in the works of Benhabib (1999), Benhabib, Butler, Cornell and Fraser (1995), Lovell (2003), and McNay (2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2004). The crux of the early debates, most powerfully articulated by Judith Butler (1995a, 1995b) and Seyla Benhabib (1995, 1999), circulated around the role of discourses in constituting particular selves or subjectivities.

Butler argues that the idea of the subject, with its roots in the Enlightenment lineage of modernity, must be continually deconstructed in order to uncover the potentially oppressive elements of the subject’s discursive constitution: “Paradoxically, it may be that only through releasing the category of women from a fixed referent that something like ‘agency’ becomes possible” (Butler, 1995a, p. 50). Benhabib, on the other hand, remains unconvinced that Butler’s formulation in fact yields such a possibility. Her concern resides at heart with a critique of Butler’s performative model, querying “how can one be constituted by discourse without being systematically oriented by the mental and corporeal schemata resulting from the internalization of the objective patterns of their extant social environment” (p. 137, italics in original).
determined by it?” (1995, p. 110). Instead, Benhabib offers a narrative model of identity that, she suggests, overcomes the dichotomy between the rational, Enlightenment self critiqued by feminists and the discursively constituted self proposed by Butler. In suggesting such a narrative model, she attempts to reintroduce a “stronger concept of human intentionality” (1999, p. 339).

Subsequent feminist theorists, including most notably Lois McNay and Terry Lovell, have more recently picked up where this debate left off. McNay suggests that neither Benhabib’s nor Butler’s approaches provide a satisfactory account of agency, although she is appreciative of how each have moved the debates forward (1999, 2003a, 2003b). She suggests that a more complex account of agency must incorporate both a dialectical account of temporality (following Ricoeur), and a generative account of the subject who acts not only in reaction to situations, but can also respond creatively and innovatively (2000). She grounds her theory in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and field, noting “the necessity of situating any theory of agency within the context of power relations if voluntarism is to be avoided” (2000, p. 162). In a subsequent essay (McNay, 2004), she begins to articulate a more explicitly relational account, noting that “it is Bourdieu’s definition of his social phenomenology as relational that has interesting implications for a feminist analysis of gender as a lived social relation” (p. 184).

Many theorists, feminist and otherwise, have remarked upon the contribution Bourdieu’s socio-cultural theory offers for understanding human action (see, for example, Dillabough, 2004; McLeod, 2005; Sewell, 1992). As Nick Crossley (2001) notes:

What [Bourdieu’s social theory offers is] a conception of human action that can account for its regularity, coherence, and order without ignoring its negotiated and strategic nature. This is what the concept of the habitus is designed to achieve. An agent’s habitus is an active residue or sentiment of his [or her] past that functions within his [or her] present, shaping his [or her] perception, thought, and action, and thereby molding social practice in a regular way (p. 83).
However, there is a dilemma that emerges whenever Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* is used to understand agency; that is, at what point does the creative self begin, and how does such creativity even become a possibility? Crossley states:

> Habits are sedimented effects of action, indeed of repeated actions, and any account of them therefore presupposes an account of action, such that action cannot be reduced to habit in the manner that Bourdieu sometimes suggests. In a sense, he recognizes this when he deems the habitus a “structured structure”; habits emerge, he argues, out of an agent’s active involvement in a structured field of practice. This begs the question, however, of the agent who engages in a field of practice before they have incorporated its structures, so that they can actually incorporate those structures. How can we explain this pre-habitual action? (2001, p. 95)

Terry Lovell (2003) offers a theoretical account of agency, based on Bourdieu’s work, that attempts to resolve this dilemma through a focus on agency as residing within a collective. Lovell suggests that in order to better understand the locus of agency, theorists must shift away from a ‘focus on “the (subjected) self” [and focus instead] on the social relations of political (inter)action, and the specific historical conditions of particular social transformations’ (p. 2). She invokes the story of Rosa Parks, whose refusal to give up her bus seat to a white passenger was a pivotal moment in the struggle for African-American civil rights in the mid-1950s.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s notion of authorized language, she argues that the success of this act must be understood within the context of the times, and that the specific moment in which it happened was as important as the fact that it happened at all:

> The authority of Parks’s act of defiance was not endowed on it, as we have seen, by Parks alone, but by the endorsement and publicity given to it by the nascent civil rights movement and by the people who supported the boycott with such impressive solidarity and in the face of great personal hardship (2003, p. 9)

On this basis, Lovell suggests that we must understand ‘effective political agency [as] interactional and collective’ (2003, p. 14). She sees the success of Parks’s act of resistance as
inseparable from the collective response that it was given, noting that previous similar acts by other women and men did not receive the same response, and thus did not achieve the same effect.

This account provides an important shift away from the individual and towards the collective (and relational) aspects of agency. However, I would suggest that it does not, in fact, explain Parks’ agency, that is, the decision she initially makes to refuse to give up her seat. Instead, it accounts for the strategic success of the move, rightly noting that the timing and larger community support made this risk on her part worth taking. However, an important aspect of the historical and biographical record describing Parks’s act is missing from Lovell’s account, a piece that might help explain Parks’s capacity to remain in her bus seat in the face of tremendous potential sanctions. Parks, along with other leaders of the civil rights movement such as Martin Luther King, had attended the Highlander Folk School, a training ground for civil rights activists. She had also been a long-time member and secretary of the NAACP (Highlander Research and Education Centre, 2005). As noted on the website of the Highlander School:

> Our society teaches history through stories of remarkable individuals, and while Rosa Parks was indeed remarkable, her story is also about collective action, willed risk, intentional plans and mass movement. … At the time of her arrest, Rosa Parks was a respected community leader already working to counter humiliating racist laws and traditions (Highlander Research and Education Centre, 2005).

We might thus understand the capacity of Parks to take that action as coming out of her own history of participation in an organized movement of activists, a set of relationships that gave her the resources, knowledge, and capacity to take that enormous risk. Such an explanation looks towards the genesis of Parks’ original act as belonging within a community of activists, rather
than ascribing it either to an individual acting in isolation, or to a focus on the outcome of the act itself.

Indeed, it is the lack of a theoretical account of what McNay identifies as the generative and creative aspects of agency that, I would suggest, have eluded previous feminist accounts of agency. That is, as of yet no theory of agency can explain the modalities by which some people come to take specific actions (especially those actions that go against the grain of mainstream convention, or of their acquired *habitus*) while others do not. It is this gap that my account of relational agency, developed in light of ethnographic data on youth activist lives, is designed to address.

### 7.2 Relational agency: habitus, field, and the space in between

The first part of my theoretical framework for understanding agency begins with the assumption that for some people it is *easier* to become an activist than for others. This sense of ease comes from specific family histories of activism or Left-leaning political affiliations, as well as a specific class and ‘race’ background; in other words, an activist *habitus*. However, there are those who come into activism via different routes – who enact their ‘agency’ in ways that are not easily explicable by Bourdieu’s notion of the *habitus*. It is these people I am particularly interested in, and the stories that they shared about what brought them into activism, and what allowed them to remain.

Although the *habitus* is intrinsically based on relationships (McNay, 2004; Lawler, 2004), it does not necessarily account for *how* those relationships might be established such that the agent is able to take actions that she might not otherwise have done. This is where an ethnographic and phenomenological account can contribute to the theory of agency, by revealing
the modes by which young people make sense of their own capacity to act, or to become activists.

While relational processes are certainly not the only manner in which young people came to participate in a public sphere of activist dissent on issues of war, globalization, poverty, and/or colonialism, their recurrence within my data indicate that relationships may be an overlooked resource in feminist debates about agency thus far. Relational agency, as I am using it here, can be understood as the contingent and situated intersection between an individual’s social position within a field of interactions, and the means by which the relationships within that field permit that individual to take actions that might otherwise be inconceivable.

There are two main ways in which relational agency came to bear within my data: firstly, by mediating the acquisition of an activist habitus through participant experiences of being ‘invited in’ to activist subcultures. Secondly, by constituting the community of relationships within which a newly emergent activist habitus could take root and find the support to both develop into further activist engagement and enable one to continue within an activist field that is often extremely challenging.

7.2.1 On being ‘invited in’: acquiring an activist habitus

Participants from non-activist families reported that they often first entered the activist field by developing relationships with other young people who could act as a sort of ‘cultural guide’ to the nuances of activist life worlds. Such an invitation was not a free-floating option available to all. The very process of ‘developing relationships’ generally presupposes an experience of mutual commonality that is often mediated by social markers such as class and ‘race.’ That is, it becomes increasingly difficult to develop such relationships the farther one’s
**habitus** -- or set of commonsense experiences and understandings about the world -- are from that of the other person. Thus, while young people might not carry all of the markers of an activist **habitus**, they would generally share some set of experiences or outlooks that permitted the formation of those relationships in the first place. This opened up the possibility of being ‘invited in’ to the activist **field** by friends, and thus changed the very configuration of the habitus itself:

Will: I think it really started when I went to Montreal. When I moved. It started out with some student groups, second, third, fourth year. I kind of got more into, I was more open to joining groups. Kind of like, I was feeling my way around. I mean, it was a new environment so it was kind of hard at first, but I started to attend more film screenings and more events and more meetings and ... more organizing. And I, at the time I had friends who were in Montreal who were kind of immersed in that culture as well. I had a close friend who went to Concordia and was very active at Concordia so I kind of, you know, got pulled along the way, too. [laughs]

Will’s account highlights his already existing predisposition towards the activist field – what he describes as being more ‘open,’ that developed during his time at university. Once this ‘opening’ happened, it became easier to deepen relationships with the friends who “pulled [him] along the way.”

Nancy (age 20) similarly articulates her already existing predisposition that permitted the development of the relationships that led to an ever-deepening involvement in the activist **field**:

Nancy: What happened? It had already been there. What was the motivation? Well I, I think it was just somebody inviting me to, something as simple as I was invited to a meeting.

Jackie: Um-hum. Like a friend invited you to a meeting?

Nancy: Yeah. It was probably a friend of mine and so it just sort of like evolved from there and, yeah, that’s just kind of how it happened. But, and the thing is though I had always been, even before then, in grade eight, I had already started to take some sense of ownership in school life and we had, I had organized a teachers, like we had to organize a teachers’ awards where we gave all of our teachers awards because, it was just like an idea. Oh, this will be something great, a great project to get involved in, why don’t I start doing this? And then, and then
I had always just kind of wanted to be involved with, with community life, you know? So.

In this case, Nancy’s experience of being ‘invited in’ to the activist field was preceded by the kinds of community projects consistent with the ‘good citizen’ within educational and broader cultural discourses. As discussed in Chapter 5, the opportunity to engage in such ‘good citizenship’ projects can sometimes inadvertently lead to deeper engagement in activist life worlds, through the capacity development that such projects permit. Thus a range of factors can lead to the development of a particular predisposition – or openness – that makes it possible to be ‘invited in’ to activist subcultures and to feel capable of accepting that invitation.

This pre-existing interest, combined with the experience of finding a ‘cultural guide,’ also provides the context for Jennifer’s (age 23) experience of becoming deeply involved in the anarchist and activist communities in Montreal. Her background did not particularly lend itself to this route; while carrying the class and ‘race’ markers that still retain dominance within activist circles (that is, she was white and middle class), she came from a politically conservative family in Alberta, attended a Catholic high school, and recalled no particularly politicizing experiences from her childhood and adolescence. None of her friends were political, nor was she connected to any activists within Calgary. The summer before she began at McGill, she received a notice from the university about her different options for ‘Frosh week,’ the orientation week for first year students. She was allowed to choose whether she wanted to participate in the regular, mainstream Frosh activities, or instead take part in something called ‘Radical Frosh,’ which advertised itself as an alternative to Frosh week that was anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-ableist etc, and not focused on alcohol and partying. She describes her decision to choose ‘Radical Frosh’ as a difficult one, explaining her uncertainty about whether she would find people there who she connected with:
I knew I was interested in it, but I was like whose going to go to this, because at the time I didn’t identify as anything queer or anything, so you have all these stereotypes, would they all be gay and lesbian, not drinking, all straight-edge type people. But all these things were very interesting to me, they had all these workshops, they seemed fun. And I had the Arts [orientation] to meet all the ‘normal’ people.

She laughed at herself as she relayed this, admitting that now she too was one of the ‘radical queer’ people, as were many of her friends. Her account also highlights the fear she felt when she thought she might not find people with whom she could relate within the ‘Radical Frosh’ group – in other words, that she would not find people with whom she shared a cultural or meaningful habitus. Ultimately, however, ‘Radical Frosh’ became her entry point into activism, because of the connections she made there and where they led her:

And so through this is probably how it started, because I met a lot of my friends, who are still friends with me now, so five years later. Uh, one of my friends I met there and he is still in Montreal and is very successful and a great activist, and works really hard, been in and out of school, really committed -- he was involved [in Radical Frosh], and he grew up in Toronto, got involved with OCAP [Ontario Coalition Against Poverty] and all the Harris stuff, and so he was very politicized, and so we were hanging out and at the start of this school year, maybe a couple of weeks into it, there was like this open meeting and mobilizing and talking about the FTAA [Free Trade Area of the Americas], and so John told me like, ‘you should come to this,’ so I was like ‘okay! I’ll go!’ I thought I was going to learn a lot about it, but it was more like, ok, there was about 15 or 20 people in the room, and it was like everybody got, we all got tasks and decided like, what are we going to do. So, I was kind of scared, but it was the best way, because then we were like, we had to table, set up a whole week of different activities, from different discussions to like a big panel at the end and the last day was a big demo. I don’t know, and I think I just learned so much, and met some really amazing people, and you get a quick understanding of how the McGill administration works, how the student movement works, how our different student representatives work, and all that kind of thing, and met some really amazing people in all different years of their education, and then yeah, from then on it was sort of like, I was in.

As her remarks suggest, becoming part of youth activist subcultures is often a clear experience of being ‘in’ or not. Later in the interview, she describes how it was easier to attend activist events because there were people there that she had met during her ‘Radical Frosh’ experience, and
because she would always have friends attending events and meetings, so creating an incentive for her to go. Thus, she found her way into activist organizing through forming relationships with other people that gave her the opportunity to reconfigure the *habitus* she had acquired from a conservative upbringing into one more suitable to activist life-worlds. However, as I observed through my field work and in the focus group, Jennifer appeared less certain of herself and her beliefs when in a room full of activists, speaking hesitantly and apologetically, if at all. One might assume that either the authorized language or the forms of symbolic domination in operation within the *field* of youth activism could have played some part here. The following is an excerpt from the Montreal focus group; I had just asked the participants to share the images they had created of their ideas about the state of Canada, and I asked Jennifer to describe hers to the group:

Jennifer: So this one’s really bad. I don't know. It’s all the beautiful mountain-scape. We like our environment so much you know. But anyway it’s kind of hard to think of what to do so I just -- And I thought of diamonds and like Blood Diamonds. It’s such a horrible film. I don't know if you figured – it really bothered me. It bothered me a lot. But no, just like the things people are watching on television – how horrible things are elsewhere and hoping we can change cause it’s like (unclear) a lot of deceit. ‘Cause then right behind them is everybody’s house is being knocked down to build condos.

(laughing)

Jennifer: This is my nice Arabic looking guy with a gun. Who wanted um I don't know his money from wars going into everything from big business to universities. I don't know. That’s what I – threw together.

Jackie: No it’s perfect. Cool. Um who wants to go next? Another participant –

As captured here, Jennifer opens and closes her description by apologizing for her work, beginning with “this one’s really bad” and ending with “That’s what I threw together.” Another participant also noted this apologetic tendency, and commented that she had seen Jennifer do that.
elsewhere; this particular participant, who appeared entirely at ease within activist subcultures herself, commented that Jennifer ‘had a good analysis,’ but was unnecessarily shy about it. Drawing on Bourdieu’s language, we might understand this as an instance of misalignment between habitus and field (see Adkins, 2004) – perhaps Jennifer is not yet entirely certain of her ‘place’ within the informal hierarchies that make up youth activist subcultures: in other words, she is not entirely certain of her status as ‘in.’

This experience of being ‘in’ and the implications it carries for participating in activism was echoed by Matthew (age 29). Matthew was born into an upper middle class family with a politically conservative father, but after his parents separated when he was 12 he lived with his mother who had to struggle to make ends meet. He described himself as on the edges of activist cultures in Vancouver, and feels that he has only recently encountered this subculture and started to participate in it because of his girlfriend, Rebecca. He also notes that he wasn’t able to do much prior to two years previously, because he had been heavily addicted to drugs and had not yet come out as transgendered. Having both come out as trans and left the drugs behind, he described himself as better able to take part in activist worlds. Still, similar to the participants cited above, he notes that he had to be ‘invited in’:

So I feel like I was just invited into it. I was just you know and still Rebecca has to say to me like why didn’t you speak up and say that when we left? Why didn’t you do this? Why didn’t you? Because I still don’t feel like I have a place in it. Um. So I think that that’s just, you know, if I could change something that would be something to change. We need to invite more people into it. We need to tell them that they’re, that it’s okay for them to speak. That, to make those environments safe.

Thus the capacity to participate in activist life worlds – to be ‘invited in’ and to feel that one belongs – often comes about through encountering other people with whom one feels a connection and who can help one navigate the cultural life world of youth activist communities.
However, even the predisposition to seek out these circles comes from a particular history, one which often includes a set of experiences that makes activist work both conceivable and desirable. Neither this disposition, nor the set of relationships that permit its development, are available to all young people in equal measure. Thus it is important to keep in mind the interlocking impacts of both the cultural predisposition to take action (developed through an activist history within the family or within one’s own encounters with the world), combined with a set of relationships that permit one to take up and develop this capacity. Political action, in the form of activism in particular, seems to be especially linked to a set of relationships that provides the support and encouragement that permits one to take action – especially if those actions are personally risky. This is not surprising given the wider cultural sanctions associated with taking activism past the acceptable boundaries of the ‘good citizen,’ as documented in Chapter 5. Indeed, this is part of the context that necessitates the formation of strong relational ties – generally through friendships and/or romantic involvement – that permit young people to move farther into the forms of oppositional practices that are vilified in the pages of the Globe and Mail.

### 7.2.2 Relationships as resource for action: the role of friendship groups

Beyond functioning as a starting point for activist involvement – through the experience of being ‘invited in’ – relationships often permitted the participants to deepen their activist involvement, taking them past the culturally sanctioned boundary of ‘good citizenship’ and into the realm of the ‘trouble-making activist’ (as portrayed within wider cultural scripts). Patrick (age 21), who comes from a Left-leaning, though not activist, family, describes his own sense of
moving towards being able to take personal and political risks, once he was embedded within a community of activists:

Patrick: And then second semester the [student] strike happened and then I got involved – got to know people and then that was --

Jackie: Got involved with [student activist group] and then --

Patrick: Yeah. On the strike committee.

Jackie: Strike committee right right.

Patrick: I was involved in that and they were planning the occupation. And that was specific – you see that was funny because [another research participant] was one of the people doing that. And for him – he’s somebody who’s done this before and I was just like whoa. But it was – it was a point where I was committed to doing the occupation. So that was kind of a step, like I was willing to do that. It didn’t actually happen but -- I was going to so that was kind of a point where I could take a step [and] be willing to do more stuff.

Jackie: Right. Right.

Patrick: And then I tell you the main outcome of the strike was knowing people from [student activist group] and then like the social aspects of that because that’s basically what everything – all my friends were from that group of people and it all sort of came out of that.

Such friendship circles seem to play an integral role in the lives of many of the young people who participated in this project, supporting and enabling them to continue in the often difficult work of activism. Such networks also made organizing that much easier, in that they provided a ready-made pool of people to draw upon to assist with actions or attend meetings, people who already shared worldviews and values and could be relied upon. I had the opportunity to witness such organizing at work one night in Montreal, while staying at the house of Christine (age 26), a self-described anarchist organizer who has been carrying out actions since the age of 15. Deeply embedded in the activist communities in both Montreal and Toronto (although, as discussed in the previous chapter, she is one of the participants who dislikes the term ‘activist,’ feeling that it
has been co-opted), she is an incredibly articulate, energetic, and charismatic force for social change. All of her roommates are equally engaged in various activist projects, and their house is a hub of meetings and events, and host to multiple travelling activists. I stayed the night there while in Montreal for this research, and was witness (and participant) to an impromptu organizing session around the kitchen table. We had just come from an event that evening related to the ongoing racist immigration policies in Canada, expanded after September 11, 2001. Four of us sat around the kitchen table, eating a late night stir fry of chickpeas and vegetables: myself, Christine, her roommate Omar and his girlfriend Evelyn. We were discussing the ongoing hunger strike of the men who were being held in the Kingston Immigration Holding Centre – called ‘Guantanamo North’ by activists – and what to do to bring their plight to the attention of the general public. They were hunger striking in protest of conditions they were experiencing within the Holding Centre, where they had each been held for several years under the authority of the Security Certificates that had been introduced by the Canadian government after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. None of them had been charged with any specific crime, nor had they been shown the evidence that CSIS (the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service) claimed justified their ongoing detention. As our kitchen table discussion ensued, the prisoners were heading into day 70 of their hunger strike. Omar, his face heavy with exhaustion, said, “They’re going to let them die,” the “they” in this case being the federal Conservative government. Christine kept urging us to consider the possibilities for an action, reminding us that “we have to do something.” The conversation ranged across options, Christine driving it with urgent questions about how to do something more original and strategic and attention-grabbing than another picket outside the Immigration office. We tried to think about good government officials whose offices could be occupied. We discussed other creative actions that could be
taken; maybe blocking traffic, maybe something with the Metro transit system. By the end of the night we had developed a plan for the following Tuesday, and Christine had composed an e-mail and sent it out to her lists of contacts.

What is noteworthy about this experience is the deeply embedded web of relationships that its success relied upon. This was not a public meeting called to include any who might be interested to come out and take part; the urgency of the issue and the nature of the action required that it draw upon an already existing network of like-minded people with shared knowledge and political commitments, and the capacity and skills to carry out an action such as this. While not all actions emerge in this way, the existence of a shared ‘common sense’ – or habitus – and the relationships upon which this common sense was built, enabled the quick and effective organizing that took place that night around that kitchen table.

7.2.3 Relationships as means of exclusion: the limits of relational agency

Situating relational agency from within Bourdieu’s social theory implies the recognition of the structuring role relationships can also play. That is, while relationships might be understood as enabling action – including the development of a revised habitus as well as supporting political actions that are not condoned by the mainstream – they also can serve to reinscribe exclusions already existing within both activist subcultures and the wider cultural sphere. Returning to the example above that saw a group of four around a kitchen table, a private encounter within the confines of a home, it is easy to understand how difficult it can be for people who are not ‘in the know’ to penetrate the subcultural walls of youth activism within Canada. One important aspect of these subcultural communities is the way in which word can spread within them, such that one’s network becomes an integral way to receive information.
about actions and events in the first place. This excerpt comes from my field notes, while in Toronto, reflecting on a protest against the repression of dissent that was happening in Oaxaca, Mexico at the time:

I was thinking about the fact that it was all the same people at this event as have been at most of the events and meetings I’ve been to lately, which always seems to be the case, no matter what city – Montreal, Vancouver, Toronto – there’s always the problem of preaching to the converted, which is part of how the whole activist culture gets cultivated. I was thinking also about how I am newly reimmersed in this activist culture in Toronto, talking to people and going to events, and so I am in the loop. This meant that I received word of this Oaxaca protest from no less than four different sources, plus saw signs up and around my neighbourhood, plus received info on parallel Vancouver protests. [My partner], on the other hand, hadn’t heard anything about Oaxaca, either the events or the protests. Something that I had heard of so often that it seemed it must be common knowledge was completely off her radar (and the radar of the vast majority). (Field notes, November 3rd, 2006).

Thus the circles of information can function to develop a particular kind of ‘common sense,’ such that the activist habitus (just like all habituses) plays a reinforcing role, ensuring that those who share this ‘common sense’ continue to do so, and those who are outside of it are unable to bridge the gap of intelligibility unless they, too, become part of these relational networks.

Such tight-knit networks, while providing the emotional and relational resources to become active, thus can also serve as a barrier to the inclusion of people who do not share the activist habitus. This comes about not through bad intentions on the part of those who are ‘in’ but through the basic emotional response of ease that comes with finding like-minded people who share the activist habitus, in such a way that it is much easier to relate to one another:

Nancy: However, if they’re not -- well there’s two things, right? It’s two-fold. It’s activism and it’s also values. So if you’re not necessarily active but we, we share politics and we share just if our, if our value systems are similar in terms of social justice and equity and anti-oppression then we’ll have a lot more in common and we can definitely relate to, even if you’re not active at all. So if you are both then we’re really on the same page and that’s the majority of my circle. And then, but if you’re neither. It’s going to be kind of hard to have a chat.
As Nancy (age 20) notes, it can become difficult to relate to people outside the common culture of activist life worlds, and such difficulty in relating can serve as an emotional barrier to people who do not feel as if they ‘fit in.’ Angelina (age 21), a woman of colour who comes from an upper middle class Left-leaning family, discusses her experience of the exclusivity of certain activist groups:

Angelina: Well not all the time but you know – and like sometimes … I’m like wow I’m not part of any of these groups. So I feel weird about going just because, like I don't know. There are certain, I don't know – there are certain characteristics about how activists kind of, like the stereotype or whatever. And – like I’m not going to change myself to fit those. But at the same time it doesn’t mean I don’t believe in those things. Um, but I also just don’t – I don't know – I don’t want to – just like go on like a cookie cutter, like I’m just not --

Jackie: what are the characteristics of the activist stereotype?

Angelina: Um, yeah that’s a hard one. Shouldn’t be hard – um, what are the characteristics? Um,

Jackie: And don’t feel self-conscious – like lots of people point to this so.

Angelina: Okay, yeah

Jackie: Yeah.

Angelina: I understand (laughing). Um, well let me think at [my university] or something. Um, I think of some people - well at [my university] it would be, I don't know, people who like – I’m not – well they’re usually like all friends with each other.

Angelina is describing a common experience amongst participants who were not quite ‘in’ the centre of youth activist subcultures. It was a feeling of being outside, of perhaps sharing values and beliefs, but, for whatever reason, not finding for oneself a sense of belonging and ‘fit’ within these communities. Such an experience of ‘fit’ was often mediated by such social markers as class, gender, and ‘race,’ and the ways in which these shaped the acquisition of an activist
‘common sense’ or habitus. It was further mediated by the specific rules of comportment attached to the youth activist field, such as enacting an activist subcultural performance through attire and consumption practices (as described in Chapter 6). While Angelina continued to do her own activist work through other circles and community groups, she was still dogged by a sense of who properly ‘belonged’ to activist subcultures. Angelina carried enough of the activist habitus from a Left-leaning family and a politically-engaged higher education to permit her to find other avenues of action, developed through different kinds of relationships. However, not all young people are able to muster the personal, cultural, and emotional resources available to her, especially when they feel shut out of the communities of activist practice where they might develop them.

One implication of such friendship circles standing in as proxy for circles of organizing colleagues (who might not necessarily be friends) is the way in which they can skip important steps in the process of collaborative work, so that people who do not feel a personal affinity with others in the room might feel unwelcome or unheard:

Vincent: I find if it’s too friendly then there’s less attention paid to internal processes and dynamics.

Jackie: Right, right.

Vincent: So I mean there is this kind of tendency in, you know, whatever quote ‘left-leaning’ groups to just be like, we’re all leftist so you know we don’t need to do all this bureaucratic stuff.

Jackie: Right.

Vincent: But you do need to do that stuff like, I mean, and it’s the double -- it’s kind of, well, it’s a double responsibility also you know, to try and get things done externally but to keep things right internally as well (age 26).
The flip-side, then, of the kinds of relational and emotional resources provided by networks of friends engaged in activist work is how these can function to reproduce the exclusivity of activist circles, so that it can become increasingly difficult for those who have not had the opportunity to develop an activist *habitus* to become involved in this work. Such barriers emerge in various ways: because networks of friends keep each other informed of actions and events; because people feel more ‘at ease’ with each other, and so are more likely to seek each other out; and because the friendship circles can result in a disregard for formal processes that might allow people who are not networked to become part of the activist work. Thus, while the potential to come to action – or to mobilize the enactment of capital such that one becomes, even if only momentarily, a political agent – is often cultivated and strengthened through relationships with networks of people already doing the work, such networks can also function to exclude those who have not acquired the appropriate subcultural capital, or the activist *habitus* that allows such relationships to develop in the first place.

### 7.3 Conclusions

This chapter has considered the ways in which young people come to take action within the public sphere, which I have described, not unlike other theorists, as the performance of a specific modality of political agency (see for example McNay, 2000, 2004). I have described and attempted to expand upon a theoretical conception of agency that is, at its core, relational. To do so, I have drawn upon the theoretical work of feminist philosophers Lois McNay and Terry Lovell, as well as the cultural sociological frame of Pierre Bourdieu. Both McNay and Lovell have articulated a concept of agency that is interactional, bodily, and relies on a notion of the subject that is broader than the rational, choosing individual of the liberal state. Using their
theoretical work as the basis for my own, I have demonstrated the manner in which such agency takes place within youth activist communities. I have suggested that young people, particularly those who have not developed an activist *habitus* through family, class, ‘race,’ and political histories, often find their way into activist circles through the experience of being ‘invited in’ by a friend, noting that many young people experience activist subcultures as clearly having an ‘in’ and an ‘out.’ The fact of this clear sense of being ‘in’ (or not) further highlights the ongoing role of authorized language and subcultural capital within the activist *field*, and the role they play in regulating who might have access to the forms of community that appear to be necessary for effective activist organizing. I note the important role that friendship circles play in supporting young activists in their political work, as well as in providing the informational and emotional resources that permit young people to remain active and involved. However, I also point out that friendships can play a limiting role in who is able to access youth activist subcultures, in that they can exclude those who do not form these friendships, and thus do not have access to the information and support that permits involvement. Since friendships often emerge unconsciously along class, gender and ‘race’ lines – because the people with whom we feel ‘at ease’ often share these characteristics with us -- they can also serve to perpetuate the class-, gender- and ‘race’-based exclusions identified by participants in the previous chapter. Friendships can also act as a disincentive to follow group processes that might open up activist subcultures such that ‘outsiders’ can become involved.

Having noted the role played by cultural codes of friendship and style, a judgment may be perceived here, one that suggests that activist subcultures ought to become more ‘open.’ However, it is important to note that it may not always be desirable or necessary for activist subcultures to do so, as the trust and reliance developed through networks of friendship built on
experiences together might be pivotal, particularly for the more politically and personally risky actions undertaken by some young people trying to oppose particular state policies or practices. Nonetheless, when taken in combination with the classed and raced elements of youth activism in Canada, it is important that such relational practices be scrutinized for their oppressive potential. That is, it is my hope that by uncovering these aspects of youth activist practices, it will be easier for those within these circles to identify and challenge their own subcultures to remain as open as possible to the participation of as wide an array of young people as they can attract. This is the hope and the promise of democratic participation, an integral part of which is the kind of political actions taken by the people who were involved in this research project.

Finally, to draw a more explicit line between the historical and contextual work of Chapters 4 and 5 and this one, it is important to note the ways in which histories of colonialism, racism, and classism, as well as the predominant contemporary cultural pressures to be a particular kind of ‘good citizen’ play into the modalities of relational agency available to young people. That is, there is a reason only a certain limited number of young people who are not from white, middle class, activist families even consider the possibility of joining in dissident practices, let alone find the relational resources to become actively engaged. The wider cultural context remains one in which dissident participation such as activism is ridiculed, dismissed, and generally frowned upon. As documented within Chapters 4 and 5, young people’s experiences within schooling of acceptable forms of citizenship participation are limited to placated versions of ‘responsible’ action taken within a self-regulating neoliberal frame. In addition, the wider cultural sphere of submerged (and not-so-submerged) racism and classism mean that some young people learn early on that they are not in a position to take up ‘active citizenship’ (activist or not) within the frame of the Canadian nation-state. This is the manner in which the wider cultural
sphere of mainstream notions of the ‘active citizen’ combine with the exclusivity that can mark activist subcultural practices to render only certain limited numbers of young people access to the kinds of relational resources that can lead to activist organizing.
8 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

8.1 ‘Citizen youth’ and implications for social change

Young people attempting to negotiate their relationship to the nation-state in Canada do so from within a specific cultural field, a field burdened with histories that continue to resonate in the present, and political ideologies that shape both the contemporary moment and the future. They must confront first and foremost the construction of the ‘good citizen’ as a cultural phenomenon that carries traces of Canadian classism, racism, and colonialism, the legacies of liberalism and neoliberalism, and a moral code that finds expression in the wider cultural sphere through such sites of representation as media. The implications of this context – that is, of the cultural spaces within which young people might understand their relationship to the state – is that ‘activism’, as one mode of democratic engagement with the public sphere, is placated through depoliticized references to charitable acts without critical scrutiny, and offered as a liberal means by which the individual might assuage his or her sense of responsibility to the state. Such placation takes place even while certain forms of activist engagement – forms that challenge state structures and authority – are curtailed or misrepresented through structures such as policing and media. ‘Youth activism’ has thus come to carry multiple codes of meaning, understood as both a desirable goal (within the construct of the apolitical ‘global citizen’) and demonized as an irrational and irresponsible mode of ‘trouble-making.’

Into this cultural fray enter the youth activists. For this work, I focused on groups that I saw as acting in general opposition to the state -- anti-globalization, anti-poverty, anti-war, and anti-colonialism activists -- in order to better understand how they made sense of their own relationship to citizenship, to the state, and to each other. I found that class and ‘race’ divisions play a powerful role in both shaping young activists’ sense of political selfhood in relation to the
state and schooling, as well as in structuring the symbolic economy of youth activist subcultures themselves. Specifically, visible minority youth, Aboriginal youth, and youth from working class histories often encountered the state and schooling as sites of class- and ‘race’-based injuries, where they perceived the ‘good citizen’ to (still) be predicated on a white, middle class norm, and apparatuses of ‘good citizenship’ to follow liberal codes of community and political participation that served to shore up middle class students’ credentials within the new global economy. Young activists in general found school-based ‘citizenship education’ to have little to do with their own sense of political priorities, or to offer much in the way of skills towards social change, skills that they later learned through activist practices.

Within youth activist subcultures themselves, the cultural context of liberalism and neoliberalism was felt through a ‘structure of feeling’ that included extraordinary burdens of guilt and responsibility, the perceived requirement to be self-regulating and self-scrutinizing (the self perfecting activist), and through subcultural codes of consumption that act to reduce political participation to such consumptive ‘choices’ as buying fair trade organic coffee and avoiding Nike. Rituals of style further regulated young people’s involvement in youth activist subcultures, in which a complex working class/middle class performance (‘performing grunge’) held sway as the dominant means through which to acquire the subcultural capital known as being ‘radical.’

Activism, as a cultural phenomenon, also takes a particular shape due to Canada’s unique position within global power relations – that is, to be an ‘activist’ in Canada often (although not always) implies that one is working on behalf of others, rather than for oneself. This is connected to the wider perception (and experience) of activism as largely a middle class phenomenon – a perception that was supported by my field data documenting the class histories of my participants. The middle class elements of youth activism, I would suggest, is connected
intangibly to the wider cultural sphere of permissiveness for a particular kind of ‘good active citizen’ – recognizable within middle class codes of accomplishment – as well as to the family histories of middle class activism from which many of the participants came. That is, although the ‘good citizen’ as described above is generally not supposed to enter the realm of state-challenging activism, sometimes the ‘good citizen’ who becomes engaged in community work via middle class processes of desirable associations ends up moving into more oppositional activist practices (particularly if that person comes from a Left-leaning family sympathetic to such a shift). That the class culture of youth activism is invariably middle class was felt most keenly by those who did not come from middle class histories, as they relayed experiences of exclusion that carried the often invisible markers of class.

Class cultures in Canada are inseparable also from experiences of ‘race’ and ethnicity, and how these regulate the complex processes of belonging. Participants from racialized communities often encountered subtle barriers to inclusion, which sometimes followed class lines, and other times occurred as an uncomfortable but necessary negotiation between family and cultural traditions and the practices of activism. In part because oppositional activist practices are represented as undesirable within the wider cultural sphere, the means of accessing these subcultures was often tightly associated with one’s family history, and thus the habitus that one acquired. That such a family history was more commonly associated with the white middle classes also contributes to the shaping of a doxa of activism that remains largely white and middle class. While people from other histories did find their way into activist subcultures, they did so often with an associated sense of unease and structures of feeling that suggested they did not quite ‘fit,’ such that they found themselves on the edges of activist subcultures, if they were there at all.
This sense of unease was also shared, however, by people who might appear to fit within the modalities of white, middle class activist experience, but who still encountered a sense of being ‘outside.’ Participants often pointed out that the rules of activist comportment are strict, and experienced what they perceived to be policing by those ‘authorized bearers’ of ‘legitimate’ activist credentials. I have identified the symbolic authority described by many of the research participants as manifesting through ‘performing grunge,’ whereby one must demonstrate a certain kind of ‘working class comportment’ (through taking low-income jobs, wearing used clothing, and living in cheap housing, for example), but do so from within a middle class frame (be highly educated, be cognizant of relevant theorists, and be articulate about one’s political ideologies). This ‘performance,’ which I identify as part of the broader function of class cultures, following Julie Bettie, is not carried out intentionally but takes place unconsciously, acting as a cultural mode through which the members of the subculture can identify ‘like’ and ‘unlike.’ This particular class performance can unfortunately serve to mystify and indeed mask the often close alignments between middle class assertions and practices and activism within Canada, and can further intensify the confusion and alienation experienced by those who come from working class histories. While functioning to accrue a particular kind of subcultural capital (Thornton, 1996) to those who are able to play within its rules (often identified as being ‘radical’), such a performance does little, I would suggest, to further the important social justice work carried out by young activists. Instead, it can perversely serve to reinforce class- and ‘race’-based exclusions that mean young activists are sometimes left ‘preaching to the converted’ at events and rallies.

That young people from outside of the constraints identified within this thesis have found their way into activist subcultures speaks both to the inherent fluidity of these barriers, and to the existence of a modality of involvement that manages to breach the walls of doxic (activist)
‘common sense.’ The capacity to become engaged in political struggles, even when one does not come from a family where the \textit{habitus} to do so already exists, comes about, I suggest, through a process of interactional experiences that, following Lovell (2003) and McNay (2004), I have identified as ‘relational agency.’ Experienced by many young people as being ‘invited in,’ this theoretical articulation of the process of becoming politically active is able to acknowledge both the fact that there is an ‘in,’ and that the borders around activist subcultures cannot be entirely impenetrable. Thus, relational agency is able to capture both the fact of the constraints -- theorized alongside Bourdieu as the existence of a specific activist \textit{habitus} -- and the means by which those who have not yet acquired this \textit{habitus} can breach them. Although such breaching only seems to come about if one already carries a pre-existing disposition that permits these relational connections to occur, this assessment of the mode by which young people can be ‘invited in’ to activist practices highlights the importance of interactional processes over and above the individualized rational actor of liberal theory. It also recognizes the important role played by relationships, within a subculture which remains outside of the support and sanction of the mainstream, in enabling the difficult but necessary work of activist practices.

\textbf{8.2 Theoretical contributions}

The findings summarized above were developed in conjunction with an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that drew on elements of cultural sociology, youth subcultural theory, hermeneutics and phenomenology, theories of governance and the state, and feminist political philosophy. By incorporating a phenomenological and cultural sociological approach to questions of youth engagement with the state, I attempted to bridge the impasse between political theory accounts of democratic space and the identification of forms of meaning-making inherent
to a phenomenological approach. In doing so, I have sought to shed light not only on the micrological everyday lives of youth activists, but also to generate insight about the very nature of the Canadian nation-state at the turn of the 21st century. I thus made use of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic detour to consider what shape the contemporary ‘good citizen’ has taken in light of the historical and present practices of citizenship education, not only to better understand youth activist subcultures, but to gain glimpses into the heart of the Canadian nation-state itself.

Furthermore, I have brought together Rose’s insights about governance with Bourdieu’s theories of culture and the social, as well as Williams’ concept of ‘structures of feeling’, understanding the latter two as the means by which to glimpse the functioning of the former. Thus we see neoliberal subjectivity performed through the individualized consumption practices of the activist, which become part of both the *habitus* and the authorized language that regulate some activist behaviours. The hermeneutic is further united with the phenomenological and ethnographic here, where the Ricoeurian ‘detour’ through Canadian liberalism sheds insight into the sense-making processes of young activists who report experiences of guilt and anxiety associated with their feelings of overwhelming individual responsibility – thus these ‘structures of feeling’ are experienced as an individual failing or response, though they are in fact common to many. The concerns of both Bourdieu and youth theorists who draw on his work with cultures of class and ‘race’ permitted me to explicate the role of ‘performing grunge’ as a working class/middle class performance, and the regulation that took the shape of a specific kind of ‘authorized language’ unique to youth activist subcultures. Such insights into the meaning-making practices of youth activists allowed me to make better sense of how such forms of exclusion could emerge within a subculture working to end related injustices.
Finally, feminist and sociological theories of agency provided a means of understanding and explaining how it was that in spite of all the constraints so helpfully theorized by the scholars discussed above, nonetheless young people who did not carry the symbolic authority of the activist *habitus* found their way into the subculture. My contribution here consists of deepening and extending the theoretical account of relational agency, explaining how this concept allows us to understand both the means by which people are ‘invited in’ and the emotional, material, and psychological resources such relationships play in permitting young people to stay committed to the important political work that they do. Although such an account does not disregard the powerful regulating role played by all the constraints of culture, ideology, class, and ‘race,’ it provides some hopeful possibilities for the means by which to expand a democratic public sphere of political contestation.

### 8.3 Political possibilities in a high modern age, or: Where to from here?

Much of this thesis was written in cafés across Toronto and Vancouver (fuelled by innumerable decaf soy mochas). After pouring over its contents, thinking and re-thinking my arguments, reviewing my data, re-reading the theorists I had drawn upon, I would leave the café and re-enter a world where pressing political issues screamed from posters flour-pasted onto telephone poles: ‘Free the Cuban Five!’, ‘Stop the SPP!’, ‘End Police Brutality!’ Many of these events and posters, I knew, had been organized, designed, or posted by people I had interviewed, or people who know the people I had interviewed. Their urgency would press upon me, and I would wonder whether I was doing these movements, these people, and the larger struggle for social change a disservice through this research project. When so much political work remains to be done, how do I justify this close reading of youth activist subcultures, a reading that some will
take as critique (in spite of all my protests to the contrary)? The best answer I can offer to this, to myself and to others, is that given by Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1992), in their book entitled *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. In Wacquant’s introduction to the book, in which he provides a detailed overview of Bourdieu’s theories, he writes:

> In Bourdieu’s eyes, the business of the sociologist is to denaturalize and to defatalize the social world, that is, to destroy the myths that cloak the exercise of power and the perpetuation of domination (p. 50).

Similar to Willis (as noted in Chapter 3), Bourdieu sees the purpose of his sociological work as being able to provide the tools and analysis by which social agents will be able to recognize and identify the structures within which they act, and thus work to shift those relations which prevent social and political emancipation. He sees this work as inherently political, because he does not understand the laws that the social world follows to be immutable:

> Though Bourdieu pictures the social world as highly structured, he disagrees with the idea that it evolves “according to immanent laws, which human actions are laughably impotent to modify” (Hirschmann, 1991: 72). For him, social laws are temporally and spatially bound regularities that hold as long as the institutional conditions that underpin them are allowed to endure (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 52)

Thus Bourdieu and Wacquant argue that critical thinking, and such careful empirical investigations as this one, are central to uncovering the power of the institutional and doxic influences on the social world. This project has sought to examine both of these elements, by a close investigation of the ‘cultural every day’ of youth activist subcultural practices, as well as through an analysis of the wider institutional structures that shape the cultural sphere through which young people come to activism (e.g. education, media). It is thus my hope that the analysis that has come in the previous chapters will not depress people (as one reader commented it did to her on a previous draft), but will provide deeper insight into a particular set of social relations that are of pressing concern to anyone interested in the space available for contemporary
democratic practices. In particular, it is my hope that those who wish to become involved in activist groups, but have experienced exclusions that result from submerged class and ‘race’ harms, might be able to better identify these harms, and be thus emboldened in their own sense of legitimacy within activist circles. I also hope that those young people paralyzed by an overwhelming sense of (neo/liberal) guilt about their own capacity to act within the nation-state, will find within these pages some sense of how their own personal struggles belong within a much wider cultural arena. As mentioned throughout in the form of parentheses and footnotes, my own developing analysis has had such an impact on myself; if anything, the opportunity to carry out this research has deepened my activist involvement (including, of course, the opportunity to meet several inspirational people who have helped draw me further in, thus strengthening my own relational ties that enable the enactment of my political agency). It has been my own emerging analysis that has allowed me to better recognize the class harms that I still encounter through certain activist circles, and those I have encountered in the past, to recognize the liberal guilt and neoliberal self-perfection demanded of young Canadians, and to be better able to separate my own emotional responses to these pressures from the requirement to act against the ongoing injustices that make up our social worlds. Thus, rather than this analysis leaving the reader with a sense of depression, it is my hope that this thesis will be an enlivening call to greater insight, particularly for those people resting on the margins of youth activist subcultures who wish to move deeper into the work that they feel is important.

It also offers, I hope, a more realistic assessment of the manner through which young people can be drawn further into activist practices, practices which I see as central to any properly functioning democratic public sphere. That is, I hope that my description of relational agency, and the importance of such interactional structures for ‘inviting people in’ to the
alternative cultural worlds that make up effective activist lives will be a useful heuristic for those attempting to expand the circles of youth activist participation. Such an analysis is particularly important for shifting the emphasis away from the liberal individual and his or her private and solitary relationship with the state (exemplified through the act of voting), to a more embedded, community-based understanding of the process through which social change happens. Many activist organizations already understand this, and are busily creating networks and opportunities to bring other people into the life worlds of activist cultures. Such efforts will be most successful, I would suggest, when there exists a critical reflexivity within activist groups about the influences of class, ‘race’, liberalism and neoliberalism in mediating who feels capable of accepting their invitation.

Finally, it is my hope that this thesis has helped to reveal one of the more troubling cultural phenomena happening at the moment in relation to young people and the idea of ‘citizenship.’ That citizenship has always been associated with those privileged few who have been at the centre of political and social structures has more recently been mystified by the supposed ‘equality’ that liberal democratic regimes are meant to uphold, and the concomitant call for universal citizenship participation. However, the ‘good citizen’ of the contemporary moment continues to valorize a particular kind of middle class enactment and set of assertions. While this enactment bears some minor resemblance to activist practices, the forms of community involvement called for are generally limited to apolitical acts of regulated charity that do little to challenge fundamental state structures of inequality (see also Kennelly & Dillabough, forthcoming). Further, the acts of ‘active citizenship’ encouraged by today’s curriculum are continually tempered by the caution to be ‘responsible’ and ‘informed,’ qualities that may well be important but that function in this regard as a specific kind of neoliberal
injunction within the context of a cultural sphere that includes media images of apparently out-of-control and hysterical activists. That citizenship education may have become another way to shift the burdens of state responsibility away from the government and towards individuals is one consequence of curricula that emphasize ‘responsibility’ far beyond rights and entitlements. That it functions within a wider cultural sphere of suspicion towards youth activism (or any activism) means that the potential for much-needed oppositional engagement within the wider public sphere is substantially narrowed (see also Benhabib, 1996). In addition, today’s ‘good citizen,’ as experienced by participants within this project, also continues to follow a white, middle class imaginary, if not explicitly then at least in the felt experiences of growing up within a Canadian cultural sphere that has long been a place of white, middle class aspirations.

Thus I hope that this thesis will also serve as a critical call to educators to scrutinize the forms of citizenship currently on offer through schooling. This is not a matter of political nicety; if we are indeed committed to a genuinely plural public sphere that challenges practices of oblivion (Arendt, 1998; Curtis, 1999), we must continually interrogate the forms of political education being directed towards young people. Given my findings, which suggest that the available space for oppositional practices (i.e. activist subcultures) have been influenced by liberalism and neoliberalism and histories of classism and racism such that they are now generally reserved for middle class actors from activist families, it is my concern that the potential locust for diverse political opinions and public debate are being lost. Such a loss is grave indeed, and one that should cause concern for all educators and scholars of educational research.

Even as I put the finishing touches on this thesis, I am constantly confronted with the effects of the cultural space of Canadian citizenship and youth activism I have taken pains to
paint throughout. One reminder comes in the form of a conversation in a café with someone I know through my community work in Vancouver, himself within the age range of my research participants. I am telling him about my thesis and he listens with interest; we then get into a conversation about his own search for activist organizations to work with, his sense of anger, despair and futility at the current political situation, and his feeling of paralysis as to whether he will ultimately do the right thing. Another comes in the form of an e-mail from another young man, a friend of a friend, who has heard about my involvement with a youth activist organization, and wants to offer his assistance. He is in law school, and tempers his offer with a parenthetical comment wondering if we will accept a ‘sell-out lawyer’ into our midst. Both of these conversations over the last few weeks highlight for me that young people are constantly seeking out ways to commit to democratic projects designed to create social change. That they feel unable to do so, due to the relentless subjectification of our self-perfecting times (pace: will I do the right thing?) and the regulating impacts of wider cultural and subcultural scripts about what it means to be ‘an activist’ (pace: they will never accept a ‘sell-out lawyer’) is an unacceptable situation in a time when renewed democratic engagement with the social issues of our time has perhaps never been so pressing. Ongoing scrutiny of both the micro-sociological components of every day political cultures and practices, combined with the insights provided through a hermeneutic detour through the historical, social and political contexts that partially constitute the present, are part of the formula for generating a critical awareness of the elements that will promote a more plural and democratic public sphere. It is my hope that this thesis can contribute, in some small way, to an ongoing and necessary dialogue about the nature and means through which democracy and justice can be continually expanded.
WORKS CITED


Appendix 1: Semi-structured Interview Protocol

1. Personal history
   - age
   - family background
   - parents’ profession (if worked)
   - where grew up
   - education (formal and informal)
   - parental/family support in general, and of activism in particular

2. Activist history and affiliations
   - First sense of self as an “activist”
   - First “activist” experience
   - Current political work
   - Past political work
   - Activist influences – people, books, communities
   - Political beliefs/values

3. Schooling experiences
   - Impressions of elementary and secondary school
   - Memories/experiences of education for citizenship or democracy
   - Role of schooling in developing activist self
   - Any teacher influences on activist self (positive or negative)
   - Any student influences on activist self (positive or negative)

4. Views on citizenship and democracy
   - Sense of self as citizen of Canada
   - Sense of self in relation to state of Canada in general – as young person, and as an activist (different? Experiences of clashing with the state over activist views?)
   - Views on democracy in Canada
   - Views on democracy in general
   - Views on “citizenship”
   - Sense of where these views have come from
   - Sense of how views have been influenced by activist practice
   - Conflicting views within activist communities

5. On developing activist “identity”
   - Role of extra-curricular or community groups in developing activist identity
   - Role of friends or peers in shaping activist identity
   - Role of family in shaping activist identity
   - Conflicting identities – other communities you belong to
   - Balancing activist identity with other identities
   - On “conforming” to activist expectations – conflicts or concerns?

6. On being a “youth activist”
   - Relationship to older activists
Relationship to other young people
Any sense of being treated differently as a youth activist than older activists? (for example, by police, media, peers etc)

7. Visions for just society
- What would a just society look like to you?
- How does your activist practice (or activities in general) coincide with this vision?
- What are the barriers to achieving this, in your view?
- future goals/aspirations

8. Closing up:
- Other questions I should have asked? Other things you’d like to add?
- Other people you know who might be interested in participating?
- Upcoming events/meetings that you will be attending as an “activist” that would be okay for me to shadow you at?
Appendix 2: Focus Group Activities

**Theme 1:** Negotiating activist subcultures

**Activity A: “The Perfect Activist”**

At the front of the room, I will have posted an outline of a human figure, and above it printed the words: “The perfect activist.” I will hand out markers to each participant, and ask them to take turns illustrating what makes a “perfect activist,” according to themselves, their peers, the media, older mentors etc. I will then facilitate a discussion on where these views come from, whether they are realistic, how people try to hold themselves to these ideals, how they fail etc.

**Activity B: Mapping our communities**

Each participant will receive a piece of flipchart paper, markers, and the following instructions:

“Using illustrations, words, and diagrams, create a visual representation of all of the people and/or communities who have contributed, or contribute now, to your activist practices, in both negative and positive ways.”

Each participant will then have a chance to share as much or as little as they would like with the rest of the group. Participants will be encouraged to continue to add to their own maps as other people speak.

**Theme 2:** Participants’ relation to the State

Each participant will receive a sheet of flipchart paper. They will be asked to create a picture or symbol that represents “the state” (whatever that means to them). Then they will fill in the rest of their page with notes, cut-outs from magazines, or illustrations representing the ways in which they see themselves interacting with, responding to, or being acted upon, by the state. I will then facilitate a discussion about what they have drawn.
Appendix 3: Certificate of Ethics Approval

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Dillabough, J.

DEPARTMENT
Educational Studies

NUMBER
B05-1172

INSTITUTIONS: WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT

CO-INVESTIGATORS
Kennelly, Jacqueline, Educational Studies

SPONSORING AGENCIES

SUBMITTED TO: Citizenship and Political Agency: Youth Activist Challenges to the Contemporary Nation State

APPROVAL DATE: JAN 23 2006
TERM (YEARS): 1

DOCS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:

CERTIFICATION
The application for ethical review of the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:
Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair,
Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Arminn Kazanjian, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.