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“Place” as Prepolitical Grounds of Democracy

An Appalachian Case Study in Class Conflict, Forest Politics, and Civic Networks

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This article argues for democratization as the crafting of democratic public space. Through ethnography of grassroots contestation in Appalachia, the article examines the social substrate of collective mobilization on environmental issues. It proposes shared stewardship of “place” as important grounds for democratization—helping to overcome divisions of class, culture, and ideology and to encourage integrative deliberation and knowledge. Collective labors to steward particular places create understandings of a shared world arising from civic and environmental commons. Place-stewardship can engender integrative forms of knowledge—multicausal, multiscalar, multitemporal—as people deliberate about complex ecological and social phenomena over time. However, citizens typically face an environmental policy system that displaces integrated, community-centered perspectives into specialized government mandates and scholarly expertise. Against this fragmenting political terrain, civil society develops “counterexpertise” based on multiscalar and multi-issue networking. Such networks are not reliably democratizing, however, unless grounded in democratic public space.

Keywords: *democracy; place; class; Appalachia; networked governance; commons; public forests; regional civil society; environmental conflict; local knowledge*

Ontologies of Networked Governance

At their best, “networked governance” projects open ways to build flexible and creative forms of public problem solving that bring diverse government agencies and nongovernment actors together in long-term, egalitarian partnerships. Many such projects draw on important civic innovations in social movements over the past several decades (Sirrianni & Friedland, 2001). The hope is that prefigurative models are emerging for new forms of governance that are postbureaucratic, participatory, and more flexibly responsive to emerging problems than existing state structures. But

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these efforts raise important ontological and normative questions—challenging understandings of what government is and what roots its moral legitimacy. Networked governance diffuses functions of what used to be called government into new spheres of life and invests them in new institutional actors. If there is blurring of governmental roles, sites, and functions, it is important to seek ontological clarity about what governance is in its new locations and modalities and to understand what binds the newly proliferating elements of governance. What is the stuff of governance when its official boundaries change and traditional functions migrate even to nongovernmental actors? Is *network* the best notion to describe the stuff of the kind of governance desired and needed?

This article argues that *network* cannot describe substantive democracy, precisely because it lacks substance—it cannot ground itself yet gives the phantasmal appearance of self-grounding. It is a useful notion for governance, if used as an adjective. However, if it is used as a noun, it is liable to create fallacies of misplaced concreteness that make it ripe for capture by powerful, noncollective interests seeking to cloak themselves in the semblance of the general will. Democratic polities can be networked; networks cannot be democratic polities. This article examines not networked governance but its material and social grounds. The focus is on how networks arise from, and are dependent on, concrete material and social conditions of collective political life.

The article explores how and why this grounding happens—in the particular moments and concrete geographies of public life. These questions are engaged through an ethnographic case study of environmental contestation that occurred in western North Carolina in the late 1990s.¹ My central argument is that networks can create democratizing outcomes if grounded and regrounded in democratic public spaces. I examine grassroots mobilizations in which citizen action was grounded in shared geographies of ecological and social life that provided prepolitical wellsprings from which to constitute local forums for political deliberation about long-term stewardship of land, place, and polity.

Methods and Models of Fieldwork

This ethnographic study of citizen activism over environmental issues in western North Carolina from 1996 to 1998 used four methodological approaches.² First, I spent 2 months of ethnographic reconnaissance to identify what kinds of grassroots activism were occurring. I used multiple field techniques to move from well-established nonprofit organizations and prominent activists to more grassroots and underreported groups and events (rapid snowball interviewing, survey of newsletters and bulletin boards, tracking of local and regional media, rapid ethnography at all sorts of community events). From this, I constructed typologies of civil society organizations (CSOs) and grassroots networks (GRNs).³ Second, I selected five representative organizations for intensive ethnography—attending at least eight of each

group's internal meetings and most of their public activities for a year or more in order to understand environmental and political visions and organizational dynamics. Third, I conducted in-depth interviews of eight individuals within each organization to understand their diverse environmental and political visions and how individual life narratives flowed in and out of involvement with the organization. Fourth, I did content analysis of public statements and official texts of the government agencies and officials as they interacted with citizens. This gave insight into how government entities appear in public space and in interaction with citizens.⁴

Like other researchers who have attempted to inventory activism from the ground up, I was astonished by how much citizen activism there was and how little appeared in mainstream media and scholarly inventories (Hayes, 2007; Holland et al., 2007; Kempton, Holland, Bunting-Howarth, Hannan, & Payne, 2001). Analyzing recordings and field notes from interviews, participant observation, and texts, I teased out typologies of ecosocial imaginaries that differentiated across three dimensions: causality, space, and time. A big gap emerged between grassroots and official government imaginaries. The more grassroots the civic action and discourse, the more the symbolic construction of environmental and social realities tended to frame questions and solutions as multicausal, multiscalar, and multitemporal. However, government action and discourse appeared in public contestation to narrow and fragment the spatiotemporal and causal frameworks around questions and solutions. Although there was much diversity of imaginaries between and within citizen organizations, they shared high levels of anger at official perspectives for fracturing community concerns—as if holding up a shattered mirror to realities that the communities experienced as integrative.⁵

This shattering of matrices for time, space, and causality compounded the difficulties that CSOs and GRNs faced in conceptualizing, deliberating, and acting on collective concerns, hopes, and possibilities. Citizen organizations had to develop counterexpertise (Fischer, 2000) to match the specialized skills and mandates of the government agencies with which they had to deal. They had to break multicausal local realities into component issues and then reconstruct them into appropriate technical or bureaucratic languages, framed according to the contradictory and limited time frames of disparate government agency planning protocols. The primary social vehicle for building counterexpertise was networks—laboriously crafted and precariously maintained webs of contact and social trust with sympathetic experts and government officials as well as learning and sharing networks with other citizen organizations.

Concerned Citizens of Rutherford County: Scaling Up as a Process of Networking

A typical civic pathway can be seen in the history of one CSO in my study, Concerned Citizens for Rutherford County (CCRC).⁶ They jumped into action in

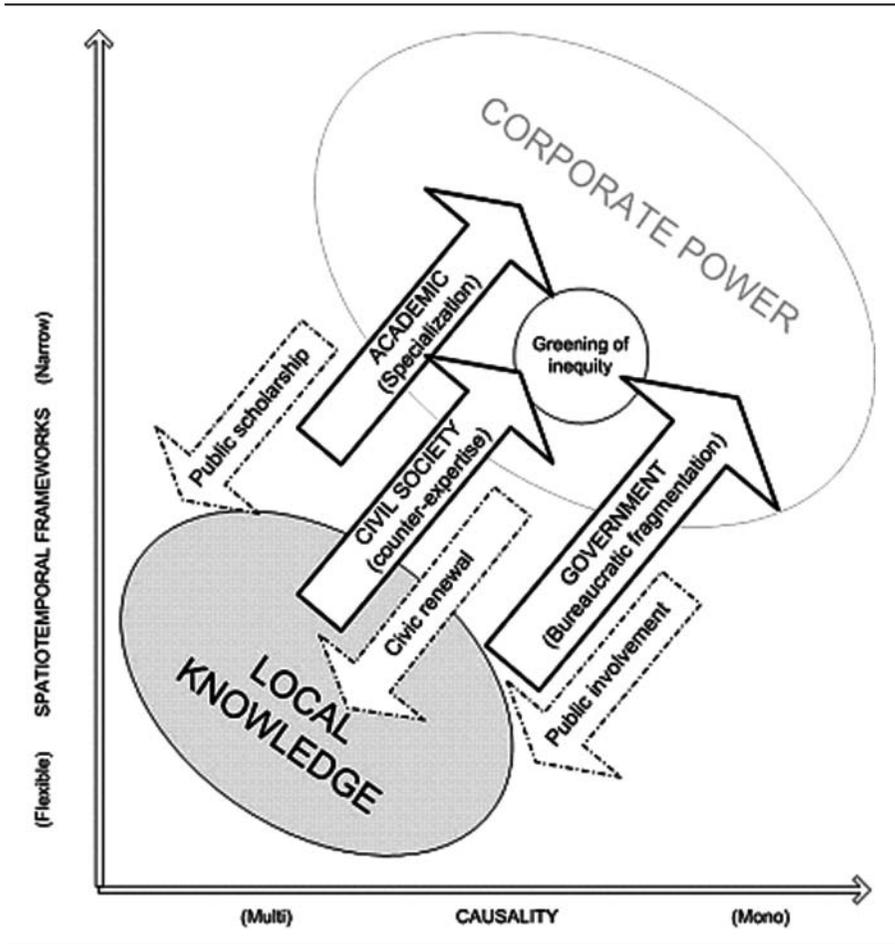
1995, as a NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) organization to fight a mega chip mill moving into their rural county, southeast of Asheville, NC.⁷ They soon realized that they needed flexibly multicausal, multiscalar, and long-term perspectives in order to address the single-issue problem that had brought them together. In the meetings I attended, the group cycled quickly between multiple dimensions of their problem—exploring possible synergistic interactions among rapid increases in clear-cutting and overlogging, watershed degradation, habitat loss, poverty, collapse of local sawmills with influx of large global timber corporations, local schools and problems for youth in getting jobs, structural changes in the economy from mill towns to tourist/recreation-related businesses, economic inequality within the county, the role of local political elites, political corruption, acid rain, inequitable access to capital investment and business loans, and so on. These issues were integrated in their lives, and they labored to understand the multicausal connections among them, but government responsibilities were scattered across many public agencies with disparate, often conflicting, mandates and institutional cultures.

CCRC initially faced a very hostile local government in a county dominated by an old economic elite based on now-declining textile mills. Suspecting corrupt behind-the-scenes deals between local politicians and timber corporations, members of CCRC decided that they were up against a network of industry, government, and experts with much greater resources for bringing interdisciplinary expertise to public hearings and media. In response, they began a campaign to network themselves civically (with dozens of CSOs working on environmental and social justice issues, at regional, national, and global levels) and with interdisciplinary experts with an ecological forestry perspective. Having lost the battle to keep the chip mill out of their community, they decided to rethink their temporal framework—from reactive to proactive. They redefined themselves as not “against everything” but as for an alternative, more ecologically sustainable kind of forestry on private lands that builds local community prosperity. For a decade, they were able to maintain an impressive program of popular education for local private landowners in sustainable forestry while working with an array of civic groups to change regional planning policy to include community forestry better within long-term, holistic economic development strategies.⁸

Relevance to Networked Governance of the Challenges of Integrative Knowledge

The strongest finding of this research was the extent to which environmental contestation was a passionate battle about what constituted the reasonable. On one side, grassroots citizens' organizations argued for forms of knowledge that were place-based and integrative. On the other side, the regulatory and policy systems appeared to them to be on trajectories of increasing fragmentation, at least in terms of the causal and

Figure 1
Integration and Fragmentation of Knowledge



spatiotemporal frameworks that government applied to assessment, management, and planning. Figure 1 represents how these different frameworks of causality, time, and space appeared, when examined from the community viewpoints articulated by activists. One axis signifies the degree of multicausality—starting with highly flexible and multicausal ontologies and extending to increasingly narrowed and monocausal models. The other axis signifies the degree and flexibility of spatiotemporal frameworks—starting with those that integrate multiple times and spaces and extending to narrow spatiotemporality. Figure 1 represents local knowledge as the most flexibly

integrative of multiple causal factors and spatiotemporal patterns. Local knowledge refers to knowledge about ecological or social phenomena gained through the habitual patterns of people's everyday lives. For instance, I tracked ethnographically dense and diverse webs of local knowledge about particular forests, streams, and species that was gained by repeated encounters with the same places or phenomena over long periods of time—enabling people to share knowledge about the same thing through changes of seasons or shifts in human or ecological patterns. Local knowledge was often patchy, nonsystematic, and sometimes inaccurate. But the trajectory of local knowledge was toward integration of spaces, times, and causalities.

Across all ideological groups, there was intense concern about the lack of accurate and sufficiently field-tested science adequate to deal with the multicausal complexity of the environmental and social issues they faced. I went into the field expecting local voices and perspectives to focus on trying to get power brokers to see, not "as a state" (Scott, 1998) but in terms of citizens' life-world experiences, human needs and values, stories, and material interests. What I found was that such passionate life-world reframing was woven with arguments for more and better science—even in conservative ideologies that might seem antisience in national political terms. Against the integrative tendencies of local knowledge, Figure 1 suggests that government expertise and professional expertise are caught in trajectories of fragmentation of knowledge (in disparate frameworks of space, time, and causality). Government agencies evolve with competitive and contradictory mandates and fragmented protocols for assessment, planning, and regulation. Against this is a process I have labeled elsewhere as the *greening of inequity*—a systemic tendency under economic globalization for the most powerful individuals, neighborhoods, and regions to be most able to protect those places that matter most to their perception of their quality of daily life (Reid & Taylor, 2009). Boutique projects of proactive, holistic, green planning often primarily provide amenities for the privileged and educated as well as excellent green-wash for corporate interests with good public relations programs to distract from ungreen global supply chains and externalities (Adamson, Evans, & Stein, 2002; Karliner, 1997). More powerful communities can afford professional planners and resources for proactive, long-term, integrated planning—creating an unequally distributed regime of *place-managers* (Reid & Taylor, 2009) able to buffer the local places that matter to the more fortunate from the intensely displacing and disintegrating pressures of economic global markets on the holistic embeddedness of community quality of life (Reid & Taylor, 2009).

Figure 1 suggests that governmental fragmentation is mirrored in academic tendencies toward specialization—a dominant disposition that is weakly countered by less well funded efforts at interdisciplinary, applied, or public scholarship aimed at community-based, place-based, population-based, or participatory application of specialized expertise (Fischer, 2000; Reid & Taylor, 2009) in support of burgeoning movements for civic renewal nationally (Sirianni & Friedland, 2001) and regionally (Fisher, 1993a; Taylor & Cook, 2000). Finally, corporate interests play a shadowy

role. If particular agencies are influenced by corporate or elite fields of power, fragmentation and specialization in the regulatory and planning process become useful tools for special interests to bracket out or deflect citizens' more holistic interests and integrative ways of thinking or to create a disorienting, constantly shifting shell game of spatiotemporal dislocation that fosters the interests of power elites.⁹ For a community organization to enter this political terrain is like a patient entering a huge hospital without a medical chart or like someone inadvertently entering an amusement park's multiply distorting hall of mirrors.¹⁰ The dangers and demoralization of such political dismemberment are greatest for poor communities that lack access to protective place-managers.

Sedimentation of Civic Networking Into a Sturdy Regional Civic Ecology

After 1 year of ethnographic immersion in the environmental politics of western North Carolina, I was able to chart the past and current relationships of engaged groups with each other. These civic relationships had sedimented into durable but supple structures of mutual interdependence (and competition)—allowing organizations and individuals to specialize in certain civic functions while relying on others for diversified skills and capacities in regional civic ecology. The organization of this regional civic ecology can best be described as a network. It arose in direct opposition to the fragmenting tendencies described above in government, academe, and the defensive counterexpertise of civil society. As CSOs and GRNs attempted to scale up, they networked with each other and identified helpful individuals or agencies within government or expert institutions. Some of this stayed informal, creating an oral lore of organizing. However, many CSOs tried to institutionalize these networks to make them dependable and egalitarian. This led to rich experimentation in organizational forms within and between CSOs as they tried to stay democratically rooted in the multi-issue complexities of grassroots concerns, while developing specialized skills, counterexpertise, and multisectoral networks with government, media, and experts. Experiencing this surge of creativity and empowerment, it has been hard not to imagine it as prefigurative of a possible new form of participatory governance. But, is it? Despite many successes, this regional civic ecology did not achieve its goals of structural transformation. Part of the reason, as argued below, was overreliance on network models of organization and a lack of investment in grounding this networking in local public space.

As a metaphor for democratization, *network* is appealing because it describes well the durable yet flexible structures of voluntary associational life that seem a necessary substrate of freedom of inquiry and action. However, there are certain functions in the safeguarding of democracy in which networks, as an organizational

form, are weak. First, networks in civil society lead to recurrent problems of representation (Chandhoke, 2009). Flexible and self-constituting in nature, they can too easily escape transparent accountability to clearly defined constituents. Second, overly hypostasized notions of network can hide inequality. Networks can appear self-subsistent and self-creating when, in fact, they are dependent on material resources, political power, and social status that are unequally distributed. Third, networks appear attractive to civil society actors in part because networking is their default mode. It is the kind of public action toward which the current policy system pushes them and in which they have been groomed by personal experience. To build counterexpertise while representing grassroots concerns, activists and citizen organization have been forced to network—across sectors, issues, and multiple scales.

Limits Imposed on Regional Civil Society by Glass Ceilings and Grass Floors

The first year of fieldwork in western North Carolina provided insights into the complex and dynamic processes through which grassroots CSOs were able—heroically and effectively—to create supple and vibrant regional networks. However, these efforts seemed to run into two barriers—one a glass ceiling, the other a “grass floor.” First, there seemed a glass ceiling on efforts at public involvement in policy formation. Citizens might successfully mobilize against a specific instance of a problem. But when they sought to reframe the substantive terms of policy they ran into structural barriers—whether on issues of forestry, water or air quality, toxins, sustainable development, transportation, biodiversity, or wilderness. But there also was a grass floor as when even the most grassrooted CSOs hit the fractured civic landscape that reflected past North Carolina and U.S. political struggles—forcing them to develop positive strategies to create alternative common ground out of the fissured divides of economic class, ethnicity, and right/left cultural identification.¹¹

Formation of Citizens for Sensible Forestry

As I reflected on these findings, I discovered that people were organizing in the county in which I happened to be living (which I here call Canes County) against a proposed clear-cut in the nearby national forest. This GRN soon labeled itself Citizens for Sensible Forestry (CSF) and began a year of intensive action that reoriented my thinking—from an analytic model of democratization centered in civil society to one centered in local democratic spaces. CSF’s great success was to create vibrant public spaces that broke down barriers of economic class, brought expert and local knowledges together and emerged directly from embedded complexities of

local places, ecologies, and lifeways. As it began, CSF brought people together with different publics and different concerns—rather like a dating service that mistakenly sets up a blind date between unhappily divorcing spouses; not only are they likely not in, or leaving, the same marriage, but they are likely not to understand that fact. But, for a time, although with great effort, CSF was able to work creatively at that meta-level where social rules get rewritten—to reconstitute matrices of local public spaces.

CSF participants were about equally divided between people from working-class families (resident in the area for many generations) and more middle-class participants (a few were from local families, but most were in-migrants from urban or suburban areas or second-home owners). Canes County was a microcosm of western North Carolina economically. Most of the population was well below national average in education and income but not profoundly impoverished. The beauty of the wide valleys, clear rivers, and deeply forested mountains was attracting more affluent in-migrants and putting economic and cultural pressures on long-time residents.¹²

In late May 1997, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) put a tiny announcement in the local newspaper of a proposed clear-cut, setting off a buzz of talk along multiple social networks. A few self-described environmentalists hastily called a public meeting. This meeting quickly turned incendiary as antagonisms of class, speechways, and ideology flamed. What was fascinating about this event was that all of the more than 150 people who attended were in agreement in their opposition to the clear-cut, but their perceptions of each other led them to assume disagreement. For the first half of the meeting, tempers and voices rose, and many people assumed (as I learned from muttered comments and later interviews) that they faced ideological opponents linked to highly organized regional or national political blocs. Certain kinds of phrases, dialect, clothing, and cars or pickup trucks seemed to have flashed out at listeners like flares signaling danger. The room appeared to be visibly and nervously bisected by economic class—as I considered where people's tans began and ended, the relative density of Birkenstock shoes, where I could smell tobacco. The combustible first half of the meeting was rather like a Shakespearean play within a play—pointing to themes in real life, national myths, hidden transcripts—but with surreal inversions, exaggerations, or mistaken identities. When Carl (who would become a key and well-respected activist in CSF) spoke, he meant to signal his opposition to clear-cutting. This opposition was rooted in subsistence lifeways of his childhood on a remote and much-loved family “homeplace” and had grown from many years of observing the forest as he hunted, fished, and followed intermittent paid jobs in outdoor manual labor across several counties. However, Carl began by saying “I am a logger”—leading many on the opposing side of the room to hear him through the distorting filter of the assumption that he was a shill for corporate timber interests. And so it went, with Carl's side of the room seeming to hear the other portion of the room as a beachhead in an unstoppable invasion of liberal environmentalists, skyrocketing property values, and trumped-up “wilderness designations”

that covered up yet another federal government displacement of resident working peoples. Meanwhile, on the side of the room with a higher density of LL Bean logos, fears simmered that they faced the ground troops of inexplicable and tragic coalitions of poor and uneducated people with far-right demagogic politicians in the thrall of global timber corporations pushing rapacious escalation of clear-cutting in national forests.

Three things turned the meeting around. First, Verna, an older woman from Carl's side of the room, stood up and reprimanded everyone in prayerful language so powerful that the room stilled. She talked about how beautiful Locust Creek and Woody Ridge are (sites of proposed clear-cuts), told stories about how her family had depended over several generations on gathering galax in the proposed cut area, and spoke of other mothers whose families would suffer if the mature forest were lost. Many of the "environmentalists" seemed never to have heard of galax or to be aware that noncorporate livelihoods in their neighborhood depended on the forest.¹³ These revelations prompted a sudden shift to fact-finding, site-specific dialogue that unsettled free-floating specters of entrenched, antagonistic ideologies.¹⁴ Second, the meeting was well facilitated by local residents who happened to be active in, and well trained by, neopopulist CSOs focused on capacity and leadership development.¹⁵ Third, shared engagement in the same places by diverse stakeholders was the most powerful bond for CSF members from the beginning. This place-based matrix wove together feeling and reason with laboriously gathered scientific understanding.

After intense negotiation for several weeks, people agreed on the name Citizens for Sensible Forestry (CSF). Several hundred people put names on the CSF mailing list and its numerous petitions. CSF was able to get well over 500 people to a public forum, but it was the exhausting, steady work of several dozen people that kept the group going. For months, CSF met at least weekly and often more frequently. They fought the proposed clear-cuts through official Forest Service mechanisms for public comment and appeal as well as by applying unofficial pressure in the media, lobbying politicians, holding demonstrations at USFS offices, and attending public events to educate the public and provide a platform for ordinary people to give voice to their vision for public lands and to vent long-simmering anger at the USFS. CSF catalyzed strong support for its position in Canes County as indicated by turnout at public forums and letters to the editor but kept failing in its appeals within the USFS system and, by the end of 1997, was preparing for a federal lawsuit. CSF members overcome internal differences enough to develop a list of specific principles of sensible forestry. Members saw that these premises moved them far outside the narrow spatiotemporal and topical boundaries of the USFS environmental review frameworks and therefore decided to shift their goals to changing the underlying terms of the next 10 year USFS plan for the southeastern United States. By winter, they received a small grant for popular education in community forestry in Canes County. However, soon after, the USFS dropped its plan to clear-cut (ostensibly because of an obscure legal problem with a deed) and CSF quietly went inactive the following year.

Constitution of Multisectoral Political Terrains of Regional Public Space

Ethnographic exploration of CSF illumined limitations in normative and analytic models that frame democratization as primarily the cultivation of civil society. It highlighted the importance of civic labors to build what Stivers calls “governance of the common ground” (Stivers, in press). CSF dramatically broke through a grass floor by allying conservative, working-class rural people with middle-class people who thought of themselves as environmentalists but whose lifeways distanced them from ecological interdependence with the forest. But it did not formalize its relationship with the regional civic ecology described above by joining any of the CSOs that heavily courted it. Key CSF members were active in these CSOs and suggested linkages. However, disagreements were deep within CSF about what their political terrain was and what it should be. Political confusion within CSF is not surprising, because the political terrain in which its members had to operate was, in fact, fractured and contradictory, with disorienting fissures sedimented from past politics (regional, national, global).

It seems essential for theories of networked governance to cultivate a rich sense of historicity. The best hope of networked governance is that it can nurture more effective and participatory forms of multisectoral partnership (government, citizens, experts). However, this is always done *in medias res*. Except in cases of disaster, networked governance must start from existing regimes of government, expert, and citizen interaction. These regimes operate in fields of power and knowledge structured by the residue of past political struggles and dreams. Knowledge of this historical substratum helps one to better negotiate fault lines and to find solid ground for common ground. Differing kinds of government, citizen, and expert relationships constitute differing matrices for multisectoral interaction. These differences in the stuff of multisectoral relationships are not static but rather set off dynamic trajectories of governance that amplify effects over time. Within the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there has been some civic experimentation that has catalyzed amplifying cycles of mutual learning and transformation between EPA, civil society, and experts (Sirianni, 2009) but in other areas of EPA “cognitive and institutional barriers” have discouraged civic innovation (Hoffman, Riley, Troast, & Bazerman, 2002). Useful lessons about prefigurative governance can be found in analysis of both positive and negative synergisms and the political terrains that ground them.

Negative synergisms have marked the history of multisectoral interactions over national forests. Certain trajectories were set in motion by founding laws that arose from the happenstance of struggles among interest groups involved in their crafting. The first national forests were set aside with mandates for wood production and watershed protection (under the Forest Reserve Act of 1891 and the Forest Management Act of 1897) with strong pressures from elite business networks. Regional networks of businesspeople were key in formation of many of the new

national forest and parks—for reasons that included the desire for regional cultural amenities (with attendant business opportunities) and to stabilize regional economies and watersheds after the boom and bust of extraction economies. Nationally, for established elites and rising middle classes, nature was taking on new meanings as a site for escape from urban and industrial life. Progressive era, nationwide civic mobilization for public lands turned to goals of recreation and spiritual renewal—with especial cultivation of imaginaries of wilderness as nature untouched by humans. Allies at first, advocates of wilderness and of scientific industrial forestry split after 1905 as the national forests were transferred to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with Gifford Pinchot as chief. Growing conflicts between wilderness proponents (led by the Federation of Women's Clubs) and rising, professionalizing cadres of "silviculturalists" under Pinchot were handled with an unfortunate Solomonic bisection of the issue. Wilderness conservationists recast their goal as parks, not forests, and outmaneuvered Pinchot when Congress established the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916.

Chronic rivalry between these two agencies (NPS and USFS) is not just a problem of governance. It is interwoven with compound, multisectoral pathologies in public deliberation about national forests. The self-identity, history, and strongly professionalized mandate of the USFS created high institutional barriers against public involvement in national forest policy. In reaction, large complicated civic networks grew throughout the 20th century to lobby for more ecological care of national forests, as Hayes has documented well (Hayes, 2007). These national civic networks slowly incorporated more ecological vision into legislation regarding national forests—with the Multiple Use Act of 1960 (adding grazing, recreation, and wildlife to USFS mandates), the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (which gave Fish and Wildlife new powers over USFS), the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA). The latter two acts for the first time required public input in USFS planning and deeply affected the size and structure of civil society around forest issues. In the 1980s and 1990s the number of CSOs burgeoned as citizens poured their love for public lands into efforts to help script environmental impact review of individual timber projects as well as the 10- to 15-year plans (national and regional). A sort of multisectoral perfect storm ensued as rapid scaling up of forestry-concerned CSOs intersected with large increases in timbering and clear-cutting in national forests driven by deepening globalization of timber corporations (which had outstripped reserves on private lands in the United States) and neoliberal deregulation of industry and downsizing of federal funding for traditional USFS functioning. In reaction to the chronically inflamed interfaces of government and civil society on forestry issues, the Bush administration tried to undo NEPA and NFMA requirements for public input. Hayes describes this as an attempt to remove principles of "ecological forestry" and to strengthen "industrial forestry" by avoiding "high-profile confrontation . . . [through] quiet [administrative] actions that were less likely to create

widespread and sustained media attention and . . . unpredictable and complicating court decisions” (p. 159). Ingeniously, an administrative ruling in fall 2006 declared that public input was not required in USFS plans because NEPA only required public review if there were environmental impacts, and a plan was a theoretical document, not an action, so it could not have impacts. This ontologically limber ruling received little media attention and if upheld will undo any USFS platform for systematic public involvement.

Many accounts of U.S. forest politics are biased toward a middle-class and urban view.¹⁶ In his otherwise excellent history, Hayes suggests that the Progressives’ split between wilderness and silviculturalist advocates meant that the more valuable ecological concerns were sequestered in the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife, and EPA whereas the USFS was captured by an industrial forestry (and its attendant private interests and market forces). But the reverse is also true. The more ecological agencies were also weakened by dualistic opposition of ecology versus economy. Multisectoral networks linking more ecological CSOs, government agencies, and academics did not look at the forest as a commons linked to sustainable human livelihood. Some argue that a recurrent weakness of American environmentalism in general is its dissociation of ecological conservation from critical thought and action about economic structure (Guha, 2000; Shellenberger & Nordhaus, 2005).

Western North Carolina has been ground zero for debate about national forests that splits economic from ecological questions and suppresses rural and working-class perspectives. Forest economies have been a significant source of livelihood in many working-class communities in southern Appalachia. For many of these communities, national forests have functioned as a civic and ecological commons, but this has been almost invisible in national debate and scholarly discussion. Nonmarket economies have been important throughout the 20th century especially in the most economically marginal areas—with hunting, fishing, and gathering (of firewood and nontimber forest products) providing crucial supplementary resources. Political economies of working class rural communities emphasize multiplicity and flexibility of livelihoods (market and nonmarket).¹⁷ This political economy produced and required sociocultural lifeways that cultivated reciprocity, local ecological and artisanal knowledges, and heavily narrativized landscapes (Taylor, 2008). Such lifeways functioned as a cultural commons that provided a stable matrix of knowledge sharing, mutual support, and networking skills needed to weather boom and bust rural economies. Working class imaginaries of collective life and wellbeing arose in thickly narrativized and strongly placed cultural geographies in which human habitation and livelihoods were inextricably interwoven into the ecological surround. This created rich reservoirs of environmental knowledge that could have been mobilized for joint forest management on public lands of the sort that many other countries have achieved. From this perspective, the setting aside of 42% of western North Carolina for national forests and parks was part of a long century of elite displacement of working-class people—a process driven by elite networks centered in

Asheville. Anger about this displacement lingers and has been augmented by recent fears about economic forces restructuring the area into a landscape of consumption for retirees, second-homers, recreation, tourism, and artisanal production for niche, mostly elite, markets (Taylor, 2008).

When Carl stood up in that first meeting to say "I am a logger," he intended that as a sign of his connection to the land, a mark of pride in his obligations as a steward of the forest commons—as he was at pains to explain to me in our later long conversations. The self-avowed environmentalists seemed to hear this as reductive economic greed and a denial of the common good. But for Carl, it was a verbal path into his lived, embodied encounters with the forest commons, his pride in his work and the beloved places unalterably constitutive of his identity and of the people he loved and depended on. This is an ecosocial imaginary that is simultaneously productivist and ecological. It was hard at first for middle-class (urban and suburban) environmentalists to understand such an imaginary as environmental, just as it was hard for them to see the cult of wilderness as a by-product of industrial society.

Over months, CSF was able to create a kind of counterpublic in which people with differing ecosocial imaginaries could discuss their differences. The glue that held them together was the place they shared and loved. Dialogue was possible because they could move back and forth from "I" to "you" to "we," because the "I," the "you" and the "we" were held in a shared and encompassing "it," the living matrix of the forest commons as part of the fabric of daily life practices. They were able to create numerous public events in which to dream new dreams about what the forest commons could be—a vision that included all sorts of ideas for combining traditional, working-class practices of hunting and gathering into more ecological management for native forest restoration that wilderness advocates found appealing. However, it is precisely this conversation that was not facilitated by regional or national politics. There were no government structures for the kind of vision CSF was building. Existing regional civic networks were not able to take up this task—as pressured as they were into a reactive stance vis-à-vis the more powerful players in public space and the long dissociation of conservation from economic planning in American environmentalism.

Liberal Individualism and the Effacement of the Commons

Emergent forms of networked civic ecology are necessary but not sufficient to move to a postbureaucratic, substantive democracy able to address the most critical human and ecological challenges of the 21st century. They have important reparative powers but lack constitutive powers because they do not sufficiently prefigure what Stivers calls "governance of the common ground." Stivers notes that liberal individualism makes it hard to imagine the common ground of a polity, because its "political atomism" can only bind people together by conscious contracts (Stivers, *In press*).

She argues that networked governance attempts to solve this limitation of liberal democratic political theory by proposing networks as matrices of collective associational life—a solution that does not go into the bedrock of social life.

In addition, the very structures of liberal democratic government, as suggested above, tend to create hypertrophy of specialization in policy-creating and policy-implementing communities—in interlocked drift of government, experts, civil society's counterexpertise, and market forces away from robust public and transparently democratic deliberation about complex, multicausal, multiscale, pluritemporal phenomena as they play out on the ground over long and short time frames. These problems become only more dangerous as economic globalization and global ecological shifts proceed apace. But good planning and solutions are multiscale—moving flexibly between local particularities and broader patterns. The most important challenges are multicausal. Ecological, political-economic, cultural, technological, and civic forces intersect in urgent crises that call for transdisciplinary research, pedagogy, and policy. Good solutions require rapid cycling between theory and action as “glocal” causal flows and factors leap across boundaries of scale and research methodologies—with risk, synergism, and unpredictability increasing exponentially. Yet, trends toward hyperspecialization and civic isolation continue within professions, bureaucracies, and civil society. These developments are partly the result of displacements inherent to economic globalization—displacements that make it hard for people to come together to deliberate about their cohabitation of the ecological and civic commons (Reid & Taylor, 2009).

Conclusion: Toward Postliberal Governance: Public, World, Demos, Ecos

This research on grassroots civic renewal efforts suggests that solutions for these interlocked problems (of knowledge, democracy, and action) can be found in a positive agenda to reclaim democratic public space. Democratized public spaces can provide the material and social substrate of democratic associational life—with networking as an important but subsidiary attribute that arises from and is dependent on public spaces. Stivers argues that efforts to democratize governance must be grounded in the processes through which living persons build “worlds in common” in their daily lives (Stivers, in press). Stivers distinguishes usefully between world, public, and State. She proposes a processual view of world as the shared matrix of intersubjective reciprocity—the often taken-for-granted “existing social world of shared understandings about the meaning of things and events, and shared skills about how to go on in daily life.” Drawing on Arendt, Stivers understands publics as those social spaces that bring people together to understand worlds in common—a process that allows individual differences to flourish and consolidate a sense of shared being.

This article proposes that place deserves attention as a powerful sub-stance for substantive democracy. I argue that the greatest successes in democratic action and deliberation came when citizens were able to understand themselves (despite diversity) to be in the same boat—civically and ecologically. This sense of common ground did not arise simply from civic networks. However, multiple civic networks greatly amplified citizen capacity to act and to reason together. In other words, civic networking served important functions of augmentation of collective political capacities. However, networks did not, in themselves, provide the substrate for citizens to come together. This was so in two senses. First, the origin and maintenance of diverse civic networks arose from varied forms of life—differing practices of everyday life that provided a sense of foundational orderliness that grounded the legitimacy of local public spaces. Second, the ability of disparate civic networks to create democratic common ground did not arise from within, or between, differing networks—it was not a kind of metanetwork that gathered other networks into harmony within it. It came from the discovery and symbolic construction of a commons that differed strongly from a network in ontological constitution. Rather, it arose from a collective stewardship of place. These civic labors integrated deliberation and imagination, reason and feeling, science and stories, in an effort to care for the long-term well-being of the social and environmental matrices of particular places—creating a collective recognition of a shared world that provided grounds of political legitimacy to carefully crafted democratic public spaces.¹⁸ If this is so, questions about the role of place in civic mobilization might be important in theoretical reflection on democratizing grounds for networked governance—especially in a century in which urgent ecological, economic, and sociopolitical challenges require multiscalar, multicausal, multi-sectoral deliberation across social, political, and economic divides.

Notes

1. I have space here for a brief survey of the very complex civic and political situation I found in western North Carolina. I develop these analytic questions in ethnographic detail in a forthcoming book on civic environmentalism in central Appalachia (Taylor, 2008), which includes extended discussions of the two citizen organizations discussed in this article (Concerned Citizens of Rutherford County and Citizens for Sensible Forestry) and moves between the diverse perspectives of participants—with particular concern for economic class. I use pseudonyms for members of Citizens for Sensible Forestry and for the county in which it is located (which I call Canes County).

2. My ethnographic research in western North Carolina was part of a much larger quantitative and qualitative study of environmental activism and environmental identity formation that was funded by Grants SBR-9602016 and SBR-9615505 from the National Science Foundation with principal investigators Willard Kempton (University of Delaware) and Dorothy Holland (University of North Carolina) coordinating multisited research efforts across the Delmarva Peninsula and North Carolina.

3. I use *CSO* to refer to a citizens' organization working on public interest issues that receives formal nonprofit status and *GRN* to refer to such a citizens' organization that does not formally incorporate.

4. This is an important but incomplete methodological perspective on government in environmental politics. To get a more fully ethnographic account of this sector, my methodology would have included in-depth interviews with officials to see from their perspective; participant observation within government;

and long-term relationships with key informants in government who could elucidate more elusive practices and processes within government institutions or in government/nongovernment relationships. Much that is important does not appear in official performances in public space or in the often conflictual relationships with civil society. For instance, my account of the Forest Service lacks the polyvocality and thick description that would have come from a view less centered in civil society than my field research was. An excellent example of more in-depth research into the government sector is Kaufman's *The Forest Ranger*, which was recently republished with some contemporary reflections (Kaufman, 1960/2006). However, Kaufman's field research was conducted in the 1950s. We need new organizational research on government bureaucracies handling forest issues to update his pioneering work. The U.S. Forest Service is a very different organization in the 21st century—after government downsizing, shifting networks between industry and the politicians controlling forest policy, deregulation economic globalization of timber, and the rise of the new kinds of citizen activism on environmental issues.

5. For discussion of similar dynamics of what Mary Hufford calls “clashing epistemologies” in community–government relations in Appalachia, see Hufford (2001) and McNeil (2007).

6. Rutherford is a large, predominately rural county to the southwest of Asheville, NC. Textile mills historically dominated the economy, but most residents orchestrate multiple working-class livelihoods, including formal and informal small-scale farming and forestry. In 2000, 14% of the population was below poverty, compared with the 11% national poverty rate.

7. By the 1990s, new technology was enabling much more powerful chip mills, and restructuring in the global timber industry was encouraging less use of lumber and more use of chipped wood products. As overharvesting led to declining profitability in northwest United States, the forests of southern Appalachians were recovering from the “big cut” at the beginning of the 19th century. The result was a huge increase in the number and power of chip mills that grind timber of all sizes into small chips—much of it shipped to Asia for processing. From 1985 to 1995, chip mill production capacity increased (300%) from 10 million tons per year to 40 million tons per year. For more on the history of Appalachian forestry see Bolgiano (1998), Lewis (1998), and Smith (1997).

8. CCRC gives a good overview of their networking and activities on its Web site <http://www.ccrnc.org/>

9. There is a large literature on how government units are influenced by industries they are mandated to regulate; for recent historical reviews of this literature relating to environmental governance, see Davidson and Frickel (2004) and Weber (1999). This process is variously understood as capture of government by industry that reorients the regulatory apparatus to serve corporate interests (Kaufman, 1960/2006; McConnell, 1970); networks of power that deflect resources toward government units serving corporate interests (Culhane, 1981); internal organizational patterns of bureaucratic slippage away from public mandates; entrenched structures of domination by elite networks that creates wider and many-layered fields of power that encompass government functioning (Domhoff, In press; Roelofs, In press); and interweaving of structures of corporate power into nation–state structures to form a corporate–state (Corwin, 1964; Hartmann, 2002; Nace, 2005).

10. For a good discussion of this governmental and scholarly fragmentation as well as efforts in the “movement for the habitability of the earth” to “connect-the-dots,” see chapter 7 of Orr's recent book (Orr, 2004).

11. Orr argues that apparent stark oppositions in the United States between left and right are phantasmal, covering up broad, substantial agreement among most citizens about what kind of environment and society are desirable. He argues that there is a huge gap between what people want and what national political and policy structures articulate and implement (Orr, 2004).

12. Throughout the 1990s, the poverty rate in Canes County was about 15% (national average in 2000 was 11%). In 2000, 66% of county adults had not gone beyond high school (national average was 48%). The median income went from \$22,659 in 1990 to \$29,674 in 2000. The county population increased 15% in that decade, and the percentage born in another state went from 16% to 21%.

13. Galax is a small, waxy, round-leafed plant that grows in mature forests of southern Appalachia. Florists prize it as a long-lasting touch of green for cut flower arrangements. It has been a significant cash crop that people have gathered in western North Carolina for much of the 20th century. In Canes County there was an informal network of women who call themselves “galackers,” with a strong esprit de corps

and a long history of grassroots mobilization in defense of their access to the forest commons on public lands for galax and other nontimber forest products (such as ginseng). They had become adept in confronting the Forest Service and in gaining support from congressional politicians—notably Jesse Helms and Charles Taylor (then the right-wing Republican North Carolina representative who was the primary architect of neoliberal laws to expand corporate harvests in the national forests).

14. But the symbolic geography that began this meeting never fully went away—despite the remarkable power of deliberative public forums to unsettle it. Halperin treats the subtle boundaries of class that segregate people, often unconsciously, in daily movements and talk (Halperin, 2001). Our meetings were haunted by iconic images of the hillbilly—highly charged stereotypes of rural, working-class, mountain peoples that created an opaque screen across which middle-class, urban-raised CSF members had trouble seeing or hearing without distortion. For more on historical formation of these stereotypes, see Batteau (1990), Billings Norman, and Ledford (1999), Pudup, Billings, and Waller (1995), Reid (1996), Shapiro (1978), Whisnant (1983), and Williamson (1995).

15. The term *neopopulist* as I use it in this article draws on Luebke's description of politics in North Carolina in which he situates neopopulism within the 1880s and 1890s Populist movement in North Carolina as well as the 1970s and 1980s national social movements that self-consciously evoked earlier Populist traditions (Luebke, 1990). I use it to refer to a kind of CSO that arose in the 1980s and 1990s that strove to incorporate into its structures and programs the principles of participatory democracy in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s—emphasizing that projects should always have the dual goal of building the capacity of participants (for effective action and leadership) and having an impact in the world. It also draws on Stephen Fisher's important and more critical discussion of the usefulness of new populist ideologies for Appalachian citizen struggles—noting problems in engaging questions of scale and structural power (Fisher, 1993b).

16. Important exceptions are very good descriptions of working class rural perspectives on forest politics by Brown (1995) and Marshall (2002).

17. For discussions of this sort of extramarket mixed livelihood in economically marginal rural economies, supported by extended kin/neighbor networks, see Halperin (1990). For superb discussions of similar forest commons and the civic commons that it supports, and is supported by, see Mary Hufford's ethnographies of southern West Virginia (Hufford, 1997, 2000, 2001). She describes a similar civic commons emerging from a different land ownership pattern—where former company town coal camp residents use vast tracts of corporate, absentee-owned land as a commons. In the last decade, these sorts of commons have been disappearing as corporate owners enclose and restrict access and as national forest policy and bureaucracies increasingly exclude nonrecreational use by locals. For cultural poetics enabling people to move between capitalist and extramarket imaginaries, see Kathleen Stewart's notion of "double occupancy" in southern West Virginia coal camps (Stewart, 1996).

18. I draw the notion of crafting public spaces from Sivaramakrishnan's discussion of multisectoral interactions in joint forest management in India, in which he analyzes grassroots politics around forest commons on public lands that has interesting parallels to what I am describing in Canes County (Sivaramakrishnan, 2000).

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