A Green New Deal for Appalachia: Economic Transition, Coal Reclamation Costs, Bottom-Up Policymaking (Part 2)

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This is the second installment of the two-part article series delving into the challenges of a post-coal, post-carbon economic transition. Part 1 analyzed participatory action research on regional economic transition; here, in Part 2, we share perspectives from within the region on the root causes of maldevelopment, including how citizens describe root causes, and how those root causes hinder our progress toward a truly just transition. We specifically outline three major causes of injustice and disempowerment: historical patterns of corporate greed disrupt democratic power structures, the shrinking of democratic public space leaves less room for citizen engagement in areas that suffer steep inequality, and cultural disempowerment creates false dualisms and narrowing points of view. Both installments are, in large part, written through the lens of the work of the Alliance for Appalachia, a regional coalition of grassroots, non-profit organizations working to end mountaintop removal coal mining while supporting a just transition toward a brighter future.

Introduction

How can we undertake economic development that generates wealth inside the region and heals the "illth" of the resource curse in the wake of

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industrial capitalist exploitation? While delving deeper into this article series on sustainable development practices across Appalachian communities, it is important to first review the etymology of "development" itself, which, according to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, literally means "an unfolding," the unveiling of processes that are already underway or, in other words, "advancement through progressive stages" (http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=development). Here, we define *successful* development as the degree to which local communities are robust and lasting, where all people have access to clean water and a healthy land base, and where individual and collective well-being are equally prioritized across all populations. Vandana Shiva, in her book *Staying Alive*, contrasts true development with what she calls "maldevelopment" (1988). "'Development' as capital accumulation and the commercialization of the economy for the generation of 'surplus' and profits thus involved the reproduction not merely of a particular form of creation of wealth, but also of the associated creation of poverty and dispossession" (Shiva 1988, 1). In Appalachia, illth is the legacy of more than a century of unbridled extraction and transfer of the region's wealth to beneficiaries outside the region. To be successful, a just transition requires a holistic approach to community-based development that's centered on reclaiming power structures, restoring areas damaged by ecological calamities, and promoting choice economics. The work of the Alliance for Appalachia contributes to these ends by valuing community members as the experts on their own lives and supporting their leadership development in political decision-making spaces. This community-based approach to development seeks to restore and build up existing troves of ecological, social, and political capital.

We started this discussion in Part 1 (Taylor, Hufford, and Bilbrey 2017) of this two-part article series. In Part 2, we share perspectives from within the region on the root causes of maldevelopment, including how citizens describe root causes and how those root causes hinder our progress toward a truly just transition. We specifically outline three major root causes of injustice and disempowerment:

1. Historical patterns of corporate greed disrupt democratic power structures.
2. The shrinking of democratic public space leaves less room for citizen engagement in areas that suffer steep inequality.
3. Cultural disempowerment creates false dualisms and narrowing points of view.

We then discuss the role of experiential learning in accessing government decision-making spaces and reshaping public policies. The authors gained insight through consultation with community leaders within the

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Alliance for Appalachia and through participation in an Alliance-led workshop at the 2017 Appalachian Studies Association (ASA) Conference, which brought together experiences and expertise from across the region and beyond.

Methodology—People and Purpose

Based on the work of the Alliance for Appalachia and other community-based organizations, this essay arises out of a collaborative conceptualization process among grassroots leaders across the region. The ASA Conference workshop entitled "Building Justice across Polarized Politics: How to Communicate in an Age of Extreme Rhetoric" employed techniques of experiential learning, eliciting and reflecting on real life experiences from participants across the region. In particular, the workshop explored ways to promote conversations about economic transition in Appalachia that bring together people from diverse political perspectives. In the weeks following the workshop, we continued the conversation by asking Alliance constituents to identify root causes of injustices addressed by their work. In this essay, we seek not only to demonstrate that knowledge sharing is a powerful way to learn but to translate lived experience into social theory and vice versa.

Review of Part 1, "A Green New Deal for Appalachia"

In "A Green New Deal for Appalachia (Part 1)," Taylor, Hufford, and Bilbrey (2017) describe the political and knowledge structures needed to integrate wealth-creating solutions toward a transition to a post-carbon economy. Simultaneously, these structures address the need for socioecological healing of the legacy of illth: damages that have compounded from the extreme extraction of fossil fuel resources. In Part 1 of this article, we analyze the post-fossil fuel transition, not only as an economic challenge, but one that "requires integrated transition in economic, knowledge, and governance structures" (Taylor, Hufford, and Bilbrey 2017, 9). Members of the Alliance Economic Transition Team have conducted several participatory action research projects that focused on regional economic transition work. Those findings helped identify and articulate these challenges while drawing from the experiential learnings of regional stakeholders; Part 1 of "A Green New Deal for Appalachia" is based in large part on that work. First, Part 1 identifies the need for infrastructures of support for relocalizing economies. Second, it emphasizes the need for a knowledge commons, particularly around the need for extensive documentation of environmental damages caused by over a century of coal mining in the region and across the country. And third, it recognizes the challenge of transforming governance structures to those that value civic engagement, "structures that are

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democratic and open to diversifying economic and social interests" (Taylor, Hufford, and Bilbrey 2017, 23).

Based on listening projects held around successful development initiatives within the region, and power mapping analyses locating potential sources of support from federal and local governmental agencies that could be tapped to bolster local economies, the Alliance for Appalachia compiled a draft document called "Appalachian Agenda for Economic Transition"—a "crowd-sourced, bottom-up policy vision" (Taylor, Hufford, and Bilbrey 2017, 16). The draft "Appalachian Agenda" reviews a four-part process leading to its production. Community leaders identify existing and potential vehicles for political change, recommit to regional solidarity, define processes and guidance for collaboration around shared work, and articulate strategies for action. Despite the enthusiasm for envisioning and articulating shared goals of regional policy, the reality was such that in order to fully implement the shared agenda, we had to address other challenges first. There are challenges of operating within a certain "regional civic ecology" (our term for the existing networks of interdependent civic relationships) (Taylor 2009, 832). There are the challenges of inherited "political terrain" and learning to maneuver within the limits of corporate and governmental power. And there are challenges around building strength and finding opportunities for progress. Foundational to the Alliance for Appalachia is a region-wide commitment to addressing the dominance of extreme political and economic power, and to fighting these battles that are much too large for any single organization to address alone. In this second installment of the article, we describe the continuation of that work.

Setting Context—Where We Are Now, Where Do We Go from Here?

More organizations and community groups are coming together across sectors and collaborating for a common cause, especially in the wake of the 2016 presidential campaign and election. The extreme political rhetoric of the past year seems to have sparked a surge in civic engagement, but social justice leaders remind us that this extremism is nothing new. While the challenges confronting social and environmental justice are complex and interwoven, community organizers and justice leaders are committed to the visions of the worlds they want to live in and are shifting individual and collective power for systemic change. In what follows, we explore distinctively cultural and aesthetic dimensions of this shift, as noted by participants in the ASA Conference workshop.

In the participatory workshop "Building Justice across Polarized Politics," we explored ways to promote intersectional conversations about economic transition in Appalachia that bring together people from diverse

political perspectives. An introductory round set the stage for an extended discussion of how to promote conversations in our communities during a time of deep polarization like the present. It examined techniques to defuse polarized rhetoric and identity politics and to widen the focus beyond issues specific to one's own personal perspective or identity. Individuals from a range of sectors, including environmental activists, public educators, artists, scholars, communication specialists, and individuals working for food justice attended the organizing workshop, and participants lent their own lived experience for collective knowledge sharing, to provide a platform upon which to learn from each other's successes and challenges. Common themes arose as participants shared and explored the challenges of community organizing, even as specific issue areas covered a broad spectrum. For one, the need for common language around economic *and* just transition was identified. Participants asked: What does the term "economic transition" actually mean, and to whom, in what contexts? In addition, participants identified the need for, and challenges of, forming political alliances and communicating across political divides over contentious issues.

While some reflections turned new ground, most of the discussion reconfirmed what is already widely known: (1) that regional struggles are not confined to a geographic place, but rather reflect global systemic paradigms; and (2) that in order to build common solutions, working in collaboration across sectors and across issues is essential. The history of the extractive industries in the Appalachian region is a prime case study. The burden of bureaucracy is such that citizens navigating terrains of power and knowledge that decades ago were commandeered by industry are challenged with "[connecting] the dots between economy and ecology, between scales, and between sectors (civil society, government, experts)" (Taylor et al. 2014, 13). Not only are local economies tied to global markets and supply chain production, but the influence and reach of extractive industries pervade our public institutions and sectors.

The metaphor of power and knowledge as a "terrain" highlights a critical relationship between land degradation and the destruction of democratic public space. Implicated in these twin assaults are forms of cultural stereotyping that diminish political standing in the national polity (Billings, Norman, and Ledford 1999; Whisnant 1983). While Appalachian scholars and activists have long argued that retrievals of both geographic and democratic public space are mutually implicated, the discussions from the Alliance-led workshop at the 2017 ASA Conference suggest that cultural interventions by activists are gathering traction as a means of stemming the assault on land and democracy.

Our polarized public discourse is tethered to dichotomies that impede the relationships and interactions needed to regenerate public space.

Dichotomies like "jobs vs. environment," and "insiders vs. outsiders" topple when we work on the space needed for public dialogue. This space emerges as an effect of proliferating points of views and voices. A key strategy for this proliferation is artistic communication. Workshop participants cited storytelling, theater, filmmaking, and pop-up exhibits in public spaces like farmers' markets, community meetings, and the classroom. We suggest the need for greater attention on the uses of artistic communication and their effectiveness in restoring damaged democratic public space. The culture of activism can be invigorated through reflexive engagement with cultural values of communities, expressed through communications both in ordinary living and at public meetings. In their book *It Comes from the People: Community Development and Local Theology*, Mary Ann Hinsdale, Helen Lewis, and Maxine Waller amply demonstrate the fruits of such engagement (1995). The ASA workshop raises the question of how scholarship and activism can bring greater awareness of localized styles and forms of communication to bear on dissolving polarizations.

As such, intersecting alliances have been key leaders in the Appalachian grassroots movement, and participatory action research has been a key methodology for building power through knowledge. Participatory action research puts power in the hands of the people most affected by the challenges or problems in their lives, for they are investigating the issues, analyzing findings, and creating collaborative and meaningful, lasting solutions (Highlander Research and Education Center 2017). Both coalitions and participatory action are platforms for long-term campaigns, and both show up as evolving practices through Appalachian studies history.

Who Owns Appalachia? An Evolving History of Participatory Action Research

Absentee land ownership and political corruption are firmly rooted in the issues surrounding mountaintop removal, creating an unjust economy and a lack of environmental responsibility. Much of the region's land was lost to out-of-state corporations, taken from our communities by the broad form deed, which allowed mineral rights to trump surface rights, thus lending more power to mineral owners—land holding companies in particular—than to community residents. It has taken decades to push effective regulations to clean up a small fraction of the legacy costs of coal mining, and finding solutions to absentee owners only complicates and slows the process. In the late 1970s, a discussion led by the Highlander Research and Education Center around corporate ownership being a root cause of economic injustice and disempowerment in the region spurred a group of activists and scholars to come together to study land ownership and use in Central Appalachia. The Highlander Center has been a longtime leader

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in social justice education, movement building, and cultural work, and is a member group of the Alliance for Appalachia. For many years, scholars and activists have revered that original land study as an "important, life-changing experience" both collectively for the region and for individuals involved (Scott 2009, 198). Now, a similarly aligned group of citizens are coming together to update and revive the *Who Owns Appalachia?* research (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force 1981) with new methods and technologies for collecting data. Many of the original questions remain around land use, ownership, and tax revenues, but the new study will also consider how these patterns figure into contemporary goals and demands (Rignall and Shade 2016). A key element of both the original and updated study is the emphasis on, and dedication to, participatory action research. Per Schumann (2016), this participatory element is essential in capturing how individuals and groups occupying different positions of power experience the impacts and effects of development unevenly, particularly within the local-to-global supply chains of an extraction-based economy.

Themes in Social Theory and in Reality

This essay strives to outline root causes of injustice and disempowerment across the Appalachian region and beyond by drawing connections between local experiences and systems views, and between themes that resonate in social theory and in grassroots organizing. We specifically outline three major root causes of injustice and disempowerment, as observed in macrostructures of global systems and in local/regional organizing, that pose barriers to realizing a just transition. For one, historical patterns of corporate greed disrupt democratic power structures. Secondly, the shrinking of democratic public space leaves less room for citizen engagement in areas that suffer steep inequality. Third, cultural disempowerment creates false dualisms and narrowing points of view.

Structures of Corporate Greed Disrupt Democratic Power Structures

As we discuss in Part 1 of this article, much of the Appalachian region was locked into a boom and bust global market over a century ago, as extractive industries became dominant forces in economic and political structures (Taylor, Hufford, and Bilbrey 2017). This rural industrialization on the peripheries of the world system created high levels of vertical integration in local-to-global chains of extraction of natural resources and wealth. Local economies became closely articulated into global markets and investment flows, but the specific details of this articulation are hard for citizens to decipher. The highly complex webs of cross-ownership and investment by corporate players veil corporate ownership and profit and impede citizens'

efforts to hold corporate players accountable for the damage. The corporate opacity that Erikson (1976) documented after the Buffalo Creek disaster in the mid-1970s has only gotten worse. In Part 1 of this article, we described these patterns as a kind of shell game in which poorly resourced citizen movements struggle to track mobile and only partially visible corporate players.

Schumann argues that sustainable development planning in Appalachia requires a "multi-scalar, inclusive politics" (Schumann 2016, 27). However, this is difficult, because it is precisely in the interstices between local, state, and federal scales that corporate power operates (Reid and Taylor 2010). The role of local elites as gatekeepers in interscalar cronyistic networks is important (Burns 2007). And, inequality within counties is extremely high in Central Appalachia.[2] Under these macrostructural patterns, local elites can become psychologically and economically invested in discouraging change, diversification, and equalization of wealth and political access (Billings and Blee 2000). This creates the vicious circle of inequality, corruption, lack of transparency and innovation, factionalism, and violence that have been described in the international literature on clientelistic states dependent on global extractive industries that suffer from a "resource curse." Because vertical, interscalar corporate state linkages are both important and opaque, regional democracy movements have developed an array of knowledge tools to integrate and disseminate knowledge about policy, administrative law, and corporate influences across scales (Taylor, Hufford, and Bilbrey 2017).

To that end, grassroots organizations face the challenge of operating within inherited political terrain, bound by the limitation of what historical context has provided. Political terrain is used to refer to the background conditions of the political arena in which civil society navigates; "the prevailing atmosphere determines boundaries and a language of possibility" (Perusek 2006, 86). As discussed by Reid and Taylor, "[political terrain] has to do with the way in which in certain historical periods, political actors feel that they have a delimited range of action, given their positions of power and voice and their understanding of what the world is like" (2010, 241n1). In Orwellian terms: "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past" (Evans and Freeman 2016). Citizens navigating corporate and governmental landscapes do so with the burden of political and economic structures laid before them, a terrain in which structures of corporate greed have disrupted citizens' democratic power base.

In Appalachia, an example of this terrain has been described as "double occupancy," or the arrangement in which corporate entities occupy or own land that is also considered local commons (Kathleen Stewart, as

discussed in Hufford 2016, 645). The rural mountain region has been overcome with exploitation since the coal industry infiltrated the landscape. Davitt McAteer suggests that in areas so remote as coal mining communities, the "remoteness led to control"—control of resources, of jobs and income, of wealth and well-being (qtd. in Evans and Freeman 2016). Here, corporate landholding companies thrive while local community members face the loss of commoning practices and thus, a loss of culture heritage, which is foundational to the capacity to govern what functioned as local commonwealth (Hufford 2016). A lasting result of the corporate control of land, resources, people, and the government has been a mono-economy, an economic system based on the dominance of a single resource. In Appalachia, the coal industry pervades the education system; local, state, and federal governments and agencies; financial institutions; and the health and sciences communities.

The Alliance for Appalachia came together to fight the abuses of mountaintop removal and to collectively support healthy and just environments and economies across the region. Local grassroots organizations began convening as a regional coalition when the opportunity to shift the regulatory landscape seemed possible for strong water protections and laws that would limit mountaintop removal. Through grassroots organizing and leadership development, state and national policy work, state and federal litigation, extensive use of the media, and technical assistance, citizen activists have made significant strides through the long haul working for steady and lasting progress.

Member groups of the Alliance for Appalachia argue that strong water quality standards are important at the federal level, since state governments have been captured by industry, effectively undermining environmental protections. The following examples show the extent of public work and the labor of citizens to maintain democracy. "Public work is sustained, largely self-directed, collaborative effort, paid or unpaid, carried out by a diverse mix of people who create things of common value determined by deliberation: work *by* publics, *for* public purposes, *in* public. The capacity *for* public work, or civic agency, is mainly learned *through* public work" (Boyte 2013, 2). A key strategy for limiting mountaintop removal mining has been to campaign for key water quality protections. With a lack of trust in regulatory agencies, citizens impacted by toxic mining practices end up relying on citizen monitoring and enforcement.

For years, citizen activists pushed for a rule that would prevent the dumping of mountaintop removal waste into streams, and one that includes enforceable and measurable standards; prohibits variances that allow pollution; and provides for robust environmental review, monitoring, reporting, and enforcement. In the Fall of 2015, citizens participated in hearings for a

strong Stream Protection Rule. On December 20, 2016, the environmental community reached a milestone when the rule was published in the Federal Register; it became effective January 19, 2017. The win was short-lived for environmental justice groups that had mobilized for nearly a decade for the rule change. Less than a month after it was made effective, President Donald Trump signed a Congressional Review Act, a tool that disbands the rule "without force and effect, and would also prohibit the agency from issuing a 'substantially similar' rule without subsequent legislative authority" (Beth 2001, 18). In this and similar instances, politicians captured by the fossil fuel industry have the power to essentially block agencies from doing their civil servant duties.

In another example, community leaders successfully pushed for an update to the Clean Water Act, to strengthen the criteria around selenium levels in mountain streams. Selenium is a naturally occurring element, but it occurs in dangerously high concentrations in aquatic life as a result of toxic runoff from surface mines, among other coal industry supply chain sources like coal-fired power plants. Citizens recommended a selenium standard that could be enforceable through citizen monitoring, so as not to rely on technical and expensive sampling processes. The EPA finally published the standard in the Federal Register in the Summer of 2016, yet the notice implicitly states that "EPA's recommended criteria do not impose legally binding requirements. States and authorized tribes have the discretion to adopt, where appropriate, other scientifically defensible water quality criteria that differ from these recommendations" (Beauvais 2016, 45286). Even after a successful rule change or strengthening of water quality standards, providing flexibilities like the statement above effectively undermine the entire intent and purpose from the outset.

More recently, the Alliance's Federal Strategy Team took on a new area of work in response to the rising issue of coal industry bankruptcies and restructuring. This team embarked on a yearlong research and analysis process to look into the current state of bonding, the process in which coal companies provide financial assurance that they will reclaim the lands they have damaged by mining. Activist researchers reviewed and compiled preliminary findings for bonding practices across four Central Appalachian states where mountaintop removal mining is prevalent—Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Virginia. Their work was especially timely given the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) comment period that opened in December 2016 and solicited input into whether the agency should end self-bonding, an irresponsible practice that can leave taxpayers responsible for millions of dollars and more in reclamation costs. The Alliance had planned to use the results of the research to advocate on behalf of the rule change, which was proposed by the former director of

OSMRE, yet has not been addressed with the new administration. These efforts are another example of the challenges of operating within disrupted power structures and a rapidly changing political landscape. Not only are grassroots organizations and activists up against the ever-present challenge of internal capacity, but without a clear strategy for achieving political wins, commitments to campaigns fall short.

Shrinking of Democratic Space Leaves Less Room for Citizen Engagement

The second root cause that this essay seeks to analyze is in part, but not exclusively, a result of the first. Fragmented power structures lead to shrinking democratic space, leaving less room for citizen engagement in areas that suffer steep inequality. We need more research on the micro-geographies of democratic public space. But it seems clear that disparities in physical ownership of the land inevitably affect the civic landscape. Historically, company control over physical space was a key factor in control over the labor force (Smith 2015). The percentage of elite and outside control over the physical landscape has been little changed over the past century. The original Appalachian land study mentioned above found that only 25 percent of the land was available or accessible to local people. Seventy-two percent of the land was absentee-owned in coal counties, and 89 percent of mineral rights was absentee-owned and highly concentrated in a few hands. Only 1 percent of the local population, along with absentee holders, corporations, and government agencies controls over 53 percent of the land (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force 1981). Under these inequalities in physical ownership, anecdotal evidence suggests that some citizen groups have trouble finding spaces to meet.

However, civic geographies are complex and multi-layered. For many decades, in many areas, people used corporate or public land as a commons, across which they roamed for foraging, recreation, and hunting (Hufford 2016; Taylor 2009), drawing on widespread Appalachian commoning traditions (Hufford 1997; Newfont 2012). Regardless of formal land tenure, informal economies, mutual support systems, and storytelling practices nurtured "counter-publics" that contributed to the legendary solidarity of coal mining communities (Taylor 1992). However, these counter-publics are fragile when not based in secure and egalitarian civic life. As contestation over mountaintop removal grew in the late 1990s and early 2000s, access to corporate-owned land decreased in many places. A suggestive event occurred in 1999, when Kentuckians for the Commonwealth filed a petition to get parts of Black Mountain, in Kentucky, declared unsuitable for mining. Immediately after this, the dominant corporate owner in that area, Penn Virginia, posted a sign saying "No trespassing, no hunting, no

fishing, no four wheelers no sightseeing, no nothing"; this was in an area that people were used to roaming at will (Hefling 1999, B3).

Extraction-related conflict can leave deep ruptures in social trust, which then map onto the social landscape in patterns of isolation and alienation. Shannon Bell meticulously documents that Massey Corporation's campaign to deunionize mines left enduring distrust that kept neighbors from socially interacting with each other (2009). These fractures in social relations can concatenate into polarized relationships to environmental and social justice movements, and to activism in general. Bell documents the micromobilizations that create fear in coal mining communities, and about being identified with people who are seen as activists against coal companies (Bell 2016). These patterns have been heavily shaped by sophisticated and well-funded campaigns to mold public opinion that have been conducted by the coal industry in reaction to environmental justice movements (Bell and York 2010).

In Appalachia, citizen activists find themselves in a "war of position," in a constant search for concession, awaiting the perfect moment to influence or rebuild the terrain (Gramsci 2000, 224). Here, we outline initiatives of grassroots organizers, and how they have used opportune moments to influence decisions around community development. Member groups of the Alliance for Appalachia are exploring how to build bridges between the needs seen from community-level perspectives and how development programs are addressing those needs, while maintaining a clear vision for economic justice in the region. These conversations provide an opportunity to share values and discuss development in the region with federal-level influencers of policy. Alliance work has fostered collaborations to support regional transition vehicles through webinars, outreach, educational materials, and other forms of knowledge sharing.

Collective experience and grassroots organizing were critical to the White House's initial rollout in February 2015 and promotion of the POWER Initiative and POWER+ Plan, which represent a historic level of targeted funding to support sustainable and generative economic development initiatives. Local organizing has been successful in leveraging funding made available by these positive and tangible tools, which in turn has shifted the political landscape in Central Appalachia. Member organizations of the Alliance for Appalachia played a key role in collaborative efforts to build support for the Obama administration's POWER+ Plan—including through the coordination involved in the passage of dozens of local government resolutions in support of the plan. Leveraging grassroots tools was instrumental in the introduction of the RECLAIM Act to the US House of Representatives. A truly bipartisan proposal stemming from the POWER+ Plan, the RECLAIM Act would direct $1 billion over five years to support

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cleanup of Abandoned Mine Land (AML) sites and economic development in communities that have been hardest hit by the coal industry's decline.

The push continues to pass this legislation in spite of political challenges. The 2016 congressional session closed without passage of the bill, but in early 2017, after months of advocates calling on congressional leadership from Appalachia and across the country to support the RECLAIM Act, it was re-introduced in both the US House and US Senate. However, new language weakens provisions for prioritizing economic development and community engagement, which many activists consider the very impetuses of the bill (Dixon 2017). While the RECLAIM Act would still distribute existing funds for abandoned mine land cleanup, the potential to promote economic diversification has been significantly weakened by congressional leadership, effectively undermining the priorities and possibilities of community-led economic development. Many advocates continue to support passage of the bill, but only if these provisions are restored.

All of these factors tend to exacerbate fractures within the political terrain across which democracy and justice movements must struggle. These intraregional political fissures are also affected by polarizations in the relationship between Appalachian regional and US national identities. Appalachia as a symbolic construct seems to flicker between invisibility in the national story and as an icon of otherness onto which American national anxieties are projected (Reid 1996; 1999).

Cultural Disempowerment Creates False Dualisms and Narrowing Points of View

A third root cause of injustice and disempowerment is pervasive, deeply entrenched forms of cultural misrecognition (Biggers 2015). Such misrecognition creates false dualisms and narrowing points of view. Since the 1970s, Appalachian scholars and advocates have drawn attention to the politically damaging effects of the incessant replaying of hillbilly images in the media. What Stephen Foster calls "symbolic depopulation" sets the stage for the literal emptying of the mountains through extreme forms of extraction (1988, 174). Indeed, symbolically depopulating rhetorics continue to function globally to ease corporate access to timber and minerals (Johnson 1995). While we have recognized and critiqued these assaults in the public media, we have not paid sufficient attention to the symbolically depopulating logics informing permit applications, those instruments of writing that enable extreme forms of extraction (Hufford 2014).

Reclaiming democratic public space requires that we confront and dismantle the privileging of expert knowledge over the knowledge of local expertise (Fischer 2009). Toward this end, the Alliance for Appalachia has always valued intergenerational knowledge sharing, and in more recent

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years, has been working to integrate the academic sector into this work. The ASA Conference workshop provides one example. However, within the academy, the work of integrating disciplinary approaches is not as far advanced. The systematic misrecognition of cultural values of ecological resources depends on the parceling out of the world to different specialties. How to bring these epistemic communities into the world-making projects of land communities was a question taken up by another session at the ASA meeting: "Ecological Restoration and the Environmental Humanities: Reimagining Appalachian Landscapes." One of the panelists, environmental legal scholar Mary Christina Wood, outlined what she calls a "public trust framework" (2013). While the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), our flagship environmental legislation, is grounded in and supportive of the idea of the public trust, the implementation of the law has been commandeered by the industries it was intended to regulate. Because NEPA is still the law of the land, drawing common cause between epistemic and land communities for the reclamation of NEPA offers a way to address a root cause of disempowerment.

Attention to culturally abusive language in the permitting process reveals the continued operation of what James Blaut called the "myth of emptiness," a doctrine that since the fifteenth century has distinguished civilized from uncivilized regions along vectors of capability that project the extent of progress possible in each (1993, 15). The doctrine asserts that the landscape of the non-European world is empty of rationality, spiritual values, ideas, basic cultural institutions, and, ultimately, therefore, people. Blaut argues that the logic of this claim enables colonization that appears not to displace peoples or violate political sovereignty and property rights since the cultures of such regions "do not possess an understanding of private property" (1993, 15).

Extreme forms of extraction are culturally abusive, and the hiddenness of this cultural abuse depends on the fragmentation of the environment into disciplinary objects for specialists, each of whom must certify that their resource will not be adversely affected by the proposed project. Specialists can review the project from the point of view of the industry because the point of view of communities has been sequestered into a box labeled "cultural resources." The excising of point of view is the essence of the assault on democracy. As Hannah Arendt put it, "the end of the common world has come when it is seen under only one aspect and is permitted to present itself under only one perspective" (1958, 58).

Activists are finding enormous value in connecting with those struggling for environmental justice elsewhere and partnering with broader movements. These partnerships allow for exploration of the intersection of oppression and systems of injustice and encourage a deeper understanding

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of how we might go about dismantling them. The Alliance for Appalachia is confronting cultural disempowerment by building power in communities and connecting people of different backgrounds and identities from geographically and culturally disparate places across the region and beyond. Recognizing that the historical and present forces of oppression limit participation from struggling communities, the Alliance strives to create democratic space for those traditionally less empowered in our public democracy. For example, in 2017, the Alliance for Appalachia partnered with the Catalyst Project to host a training to help members better understand and incorporate intersectional issues of privilege and oppression into grassroots organizing. This training focused on exploring ways that racial and economic injustices are connected and how the Alliance can better incorporate anti-racist values into all areas of their work. While this isn't the traditional expertise of the coalition, and despite the internal challenges of avoiding mission drift, its members have identified the need to focus on this area of work, along with their expertise of regional knowledge sharing. By exploring the intersectionality of oppressions, be it through anti-racism for collective liberation or organizing with other rural working-class organizations across the country, activists are drawing connections based on inherent values of the work toward social and economic justice, and recognize this work as part of a long-term effort. Schumann describes slow democracy in a positive light: "Diverse constituencies add diverse skills and resources, such as wider social and human capital networks, that strengthen and add strategic flexibility to community-based organizations" (2016, 27).

Finally, the discussion of a role for the arts that emerged during the "Building Justice across Polarized Politics" workshop offers another way in which citizen activists have been addressing the loss of public democratic space. For example, artistic communication on which activists rely during many events—like community meetings, direct action events, and public teach-ins—actually generates social space. Looking more broadly, we see that many customs traditionally practiced on Appalachian landscapes have imbued the land itself with what legal scholar Carol Rose calls an "inherent publicness" (Hufford 2016, 643). Artistic and celebratory forms of expression have often been regarded as ancillary to achieving civic goals, yet we might ask how such forms are actually foundational. John Dewey, who wrote about the public and its problems, espoused the restoration of aesthetic values to ordinary processes of living (1934). We tend to take such values for granted. Artistic practices, including forms taken by storytelling and public display, function in ways that are needed for rebuilding social, human, and natural capital in the region. The formal properties of artistic communication prompt reflection on messages that are framed and held out for collective deliberation. Many sorts of public display provide structure to

the interactions among the multiple points of view that define democratic public space. The framing of an event—whether stories told in conversation or the festive production of a demonstration—provides a structure within which all participants may find a place. If, as Paulo Freire put it, "we make the road by walking" (Horton and Freire 1990, 6), we also take back our public by talking together. Forms of artistic communication become stand-ins for what can draw us together outside of the artistic communication: the environment that is our world in common.

Conclusion

In this essay, we identify root causes of injustice and disempowerment through a regional lens, and analyze themes in social theory that resonate in grassroots organizing and community activism. We discuss how the work of the Alliance for Appalachia as a regional coalition of grassroots leaders addresses social and environmental justice issues and how local work affects and is affected by local-to-global networks of civic relationships, industry influence, and supply chain demand. We explain how structures of corporate greed disrupt democratic power structures, leaving less room for citizen engagement and how such disrupted structures misrepresent cultural aspects so vital to well-being in Appalachia. The labor of citizens to maintain democracy, the "public work" that Boyte (2013) discusses, exemplifies disrupted power structures as a hindrance on citizen engagement. In an interview with United Mountain Defense, Carol Judy, a beloved activist and root digger, explained the contradictions of a social structure that does not merge wealth and "rural work" in our communities (Judy 2013). Judy would frequently share her visions for community development and empowerment, including cultivating cultural preservation by valuing communities of place by the expertise of the people who live there. She valued "work" by the degree to which one feels productive and engaged, and suggested that for us to address oppressive systemic systems imposed on Appalachian communities, that "[we must] be able to exercise a sense of governance and control over the resources that let you live. Air and water's necessary for us all" (Judy 2013).

Acknowledgment

We dedicate this article to Carol Judy, whose life embodied the vision and values towards which we strive. Carol was a traditional root digger in her native mountains of eastern Tennessee, and a steward of the mountains and the plants that grow there. She co-founded the Clearfork Community Institute and worked as a community development practitioner with the Woodland Community Land Trust for over twenty years. Her death on February 24, 2017, was a devastating loss to the community working for just transition in Central Appalachia. Her brilliant insights, eloquence, and loving ways helped build a wide and deep community of solidarity and peer learning. She had a remarkable gift for conveying the historical, moral, and cultural meanings of land-based Appalachian livelihoods and their potential import for twenty-first-century moral economies.

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Notes

1. The authors have worked closely with the Economic Transition team of the Alliance for Appalachia over the years described in this article. Our methods included participant observation of events described, as well as extensive use of the notes that the team generates as part of its work for Alliance members. This text has been circulated to the Alliance for review and approval.

2. To explore data on inequality in the United States, on the Energy Collaboratory website (http://www.truecostcollaboratory.org/data-gallery/wellbeing/#county), go to the map Gini Coefficient 2010, which depicts counties that were high, medium, and low producers of coal over the past three decades (indicated with slashes on the map). It also displays data about inequality from 2010 using a standard international index of inequality, the Gini Coefficient. This measures inequality on a scale of 0 (absolute equality) to 100 (absolute inequality).

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