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RE-CONNECTING LIVES TO THE LAND:
NURTURING A DEEP DIALOGUE IN CIVIC AGRICULTURE

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By
Allison Noelle Hayes-Conroy

Thesis Committee:

Jon D. Goss, Chairperson
Krisna Suryanata
Karen Umemoto

to my grandparents

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Preamble

Plato used the stars as a metaphor for the heavenly principles which aspiring leaders in the republic would look up to in order to guide their society well. The Guardians would oversee the culture and public ceremonies propagating these principles. Religion professor Steven Rockefeller has, renewing Plato, described the principles of the Earth Charter as such stars for our time. In Burlington and neighboring counties of New Jersey today the stars have become faint, both literally and figuratively as family farms, woodlands and fields recede before an onslaught of highways, car dealerships, big-box stores, and residential developments. On the other hand, the cultural memory of "the Garden State" is still fresh, and seasonal celebrations still honor it. The ecological landscape is contested: in the grassroots, support for principles similar to the Earth Charter's are on the rise. Yet it is difficult to identify from whence will come the "sea-change" in consciousness of ecology and place that writers like Thomas Berry and Yi-Fu Tuan say is necessary in order to restore a sustainable world. How can we change the way we think about the natural world -- deeply, rapidly, effectively? How can we bridge the disconnect between people and land in South Jersey so that a communally upheld localism emerges, dedicated to the care of people, land and community?

In my recent book South Jersey under the Stars I express an irony in the "Garden State" nickname by exploring this assumed need for South Jersey residents to restore their relationship with the land – the garden. The book begins with a premise: that all social institutions will bend now in the direction of ecology -- or become dated, dysfunctional, as Hegel might put it, "historically surpassed." One of suggestions I make for bringing about such societal ecological bending within this portion of the Garden State is to reunite somehow with the working garden – that is, with the numerous small scale family farms that continue to survive in the now largely suburban Burlington County. Yet, I recognize that this reunion must be more than isolated token recollections of the "Garden State ideal" if it is to encourage deep cultural, philosophical, epistemological, and perhaps even spiritual change

in the region. The reunion must go beyond the farmers markets, farmland preservation projects, seasonal festivals and other political and economic initiatives that already exist to in some way connect South Jersey residents with regional agriculture. The reunion must be a matter of wholeness – life-rooted, not project-oriented – and must come from within, from the land, the ‘grassroots’, the people of South Jersey themselves.

As a holistic theorist and agri-cultural¹ geographer I am interested in the idea of linking geography with prescriptive thinking – of seeing geography as a form of planning. Geography is descriptive or normative in its analysis of space and place, but it is not often thought of as prescriptive (Ridgely 2004). Considering the prescriptive potential of geography means bringing academic work in the discipline to a very pragmatic, yet at the same time rather visionary level. My work within agri-cultural geography grapples with the questions of stewardship and sustainability – stewardship and sustainability of human communities, of bio-communities, and of soil and water communities. I have chosen to work within agri-cultural geography because I see the potential of agriculture to act as a central tenet through which humans can connect with the particularities of the places they inhabit. I see this as true not only in economic terms, but also in social, ecological, and perhaps spiritual ways. Many ecologists, theologians, economists, and political activists have considered the possibilities for agriculture to provide the guiding principles for local, regional, and global change. After all, agriculture is a basic, primordial bond of humans with the land. Accordingly, I have looked at festivals, public awareness initiatives, and other ways of connecting farmers and farmlands to those around them with the understanding that such connectedness might have important benefits. Yet, I also understand that I cannot be sure of these benefits in any universal way. Thus, I want to negotiate such ideas in action, with the people of the region making their own decisions about the truth of these ideas and together discovering how such ideas will affect their collective future.

Along these lines, South Jersey under the Stars has set up a dialogue to begin to discuss how the people of Burlington County see and interact with the particularities of

agriculture in their homeplace. My working model for such community dialogue is the January 8, 2005 forum entitled “Burlington County Culture and Agriculture: Re-connecting our lives to the land.” The forum, which came out of the research of this thesis, began the ‘real work,’ as we might say in the tradition of books like Robert Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart*, of communities negotiating their way forward. Here I sought to engage local residents in dialogue -- deep dialogue^b -- about their individual and collective understandings of agriculture. I began to reveal local viewpoints and attitudes regarding the proposition that South Jersey residents could re-connect to the land and to each other by coming to terms with the “wholeness” or holistic nature of agriculture. Wholeness is an important concept that I use throughout this thesis. It refers to an understanding of the connectedness or relatedness of oneself to all other things, including especially the land as a major source of matter, nutrients, and energy. Reflecting on the wholeness of agriculture suggests considering the concept of agriculture itself in a new, more expansive light. At the January 8 forum and in numerous interviews and group meetings prior to the forum, local South Jersey residents examined agriculture as a broadened concept that involves ritual, intellectual focus, and cultural sustenance as well as planting, ecological cycling, and bodily nourishment. In this way, at the forum and through my preliminary thesis research South Jersey residents have energized a local dialogue that tries to plan for future sustainability and stewardship by calling for a recognition of our communal ties to the land.

Other concepts of equal importance and relevance to wholeness in this thesis include notions like “culture,” “identity,” and “dialogue.” Like wholeness, each of these concepts I use in their most fluid, broad, or expanded meanings. When I speak of culture, I speak of simply the habits, beliefs and attitudes that people accumulate over time and that define for them their general behavior and way of life. When I speak of identity I am referring to the way that people see themselves – the things people think about in giving a description of who

^a I explain my work as agri-cultural geography in order to blend agricultural and cultural geography in a way that insists upon the recognition of agriculture as a cultural phenomenon that is significant to all individuals.

^b I emphasize “deep dialogue” here as an allusion to the term that has been pioneered by Ashok Gangadean of the Global Dialogue Institute (GDI). He presents a detailed conceptualization of “deep-dialogue” as a way to promote a more truly dialogical way of communicating that allows us to move beyond binary conflict (monologue) and

they are, and how they fit into various social groups and overall society. Related to both identity and culture, of course, is the idea of worldview or perspective. Because this thesis deals with the possibility of change in worldview or perspective (in relation to ecology), we find that dialogue, in its most fundamental or expanded signification, becomes central. Thus, when I refer to dialogue in this thesis I am generally referring to communication between individuals and groups in which people attempt to transcend their own perspective or worldview. We might express the ideal of this rather holistic portrayal of communication or community dialogue, as ‘deep dialogue.’

Problem Statement and Significance

The argument for a new kind of ‘holistic’ community dialogue is simple; many planners and educators increasingly agree that too much of “planning” has been dominated by economic variables. Those who are interested in issues of substantive small-scale democracy, land stewardship, and environmental, economic, and social sustainability have recognized the importance of including issues of identity – of culture, values, emotions, and spirituality in the planning process (Thomashow 2002, and Forester 1999). Community planning understands that as people become more aware of their surroundings and more self-reflective as to how they belong in relation to a community of ‘others’ they become more likely to engage themselves in civic activities. This community of ‘others’ can include people as well as the broader ‘community’ of plants, wildlife, soils, waters, and landscapes (Hannum 1995). In addition, many community planners recognize that the significance of this idea of ‘becoming more aware’ is a result of the underlying necessity of not simply having “knowledge” of one’s homeplace but rather creating a “learning culture” in which the dynamics of attentiveness are fueled by a mutual desire to know and care for the whole of a place (Kauffman 1980). Thus, planners draw out people’s thoughts, fears, and desires in regard to their local homeplace in an attempt to not only understand a given situation in

towards a more meditative understanding of the “other” (GDI 1998). I extend the concept of dialogue to include

'local' terms but also to create, essentially, a "new social reality through discourse that encourages and supports learning" (Forester 1999, 126). Similarly, I began work in South Jersey by speaking with key regional residents about particular initiatives in Burlington County – classes, workshops, community outreach – but my ultimate goal has not been to assess these as individual projects. Instead, I have attempted to set the stage for continued participatory community negotiation – a public "planning through learning" – that begins with South Jersey residents challenging together what, why, and how they 'know' and 'feel' about their farms, foods, and physical landscapes. I see this "planning through learning" or "learning through planning," as a form of cultural dialectics and identity building that speaks to the situation of agriculture in ways that have the potential to prompt a devotion to 'place'. Hence emerge clear civic potentials: the possibility to promote active, communal land stewardship, attentiveness to development, landscape, and 'community' and a substantive local democracy.

This depiction of my work should make my general research concern quite clear; effectively, the 'problem' I have sought to remedy is the need to identify a planning process – a way forward – by which regions like Southern New Jersey can become sensitive to the idea of "wholeness." To begin to address this broader concern, this thesis examines the meanings, possibilities and roles of dialogue-based, cultural-learning techniques. Although this work is of potential relevance to all world regions, and although all regions are in some way agriculturally relevant, I want to stress that my research is particularly designed for regions of so-called western "developed market economies," and for suburban-urban localities that define themselves in relation to farming. This focus is not accidental. It stems from a long line of authors and scholars who have consistently insisted that what is really needed in terms of the management of modern socio-environmental problems are deep shifts in the hegemonic "Western" (corporate/consumer/industrial) world-view that resonates from and within the cultural milieu of these areas (Orr 1992). However, I do not wish to purport that all that is 'western,' industrial, and corporate in such suburban-urban localities is inherently

non-verbal means of communication (i.e. gesture, sensory perception, ceremony, ritual).

wrong, or anti-ecological, and all that is local, small, and 'alternative' is here inherently sustainable and right. In this thesis I urge for a questioning of *all* of the values and systems of belief that are normally taken for granted. I offer the idea that a crucial yet much ignored strategy of change is the advancement of a culture of civic engagement that is rooted in the land, but I do not pretend to know exactly what such a culture would include. I explore how local people in suburban South Jersey receive the idea of using dialogue to further the civic potentials of agriculture, and specifically how they envision agriculture as a cultural framework or medium through which to further communal "ecological" thought. The main question of the research is as follows: To what practical extent do South Jersey educators (focusing on higher and community education) find legitimacy with the suggestion that we can use local agriculture as a foundation for deepening our sense of place and stewardship?

In trying to answer this question, I use the case study of Burlington County, Southern New Jersey to examine the interface between public education and the ideals of agriculture. I often focus on small-scale agriculture (the family farm) because this is what is present in the South Jersey region. Agriculture is used as a framework to address the concept of 'wholeness,' or the assumption of a basic interconnectedness between people and 'place' in its ecological and social entirety. Considering wholeness in public education entails active local participation in examining the idea that there is a union between people, 'land', and community. Thus, the research of this thesis is action-oriented. My methods are dialogic and reflexive, derived from techniques of both Cultural Studies and community planning, and particularly from ideas of 'intentional educational activity' and 'transformative learning' (Wilson 1996, Forrester 1999). I involve others in dynamic and critical exploration of the bridges between theories of agriculture and sites of learning or outreach in the Burlington County region. I do this with two motives in mind. First, as a long-term resident of South Jersey I have a desire to nurture my homeplace, to cultivate a communal sense of belonging, and to protect its ecological and social particularities from the abstracting tendencies of corporate consumerism and the industrial mindset. Second, as an *agri-cultural* geographer I have a desire to test out this kind of critical, pedagogical, dialogue-based approach to

academic research in order to determine its feasibility in speaking to some of the issues of food systems and ecological integrity and 'sustainability' that have been identified in geographic, sociological, ecological, and other academic literatures.

The significance of this research for the discipline of geography is based in the assumption that a recent cultural turn within the sub-field of agricultural geography presents geography with some fresh and constructive ideas (Morris and Evans 2003). This may be especially true when the cultural turn is examined in relation to a broader shift in academia as a whole, which emphasizes participatory-type research, localized ways-of knowing, and 'soft', dialogic learning. This broader shift, while not inherently linked to philosophical postmodernism certainly has been strengthened by talk of a 'postmodern' era. Indeed, what materializes in a 'postmodern' era with a synthesis of theory and methods from holistic fields like geography, cultural studies, development studies, environmental studies, and planning, is a hybrid pedagogical form that seeks to put to use somewhat postmodern ideas of what I might describe as 'critical cultural dialogue,' towards rather modernist objectives. Such modernist objectives might include those I have alluded to above: environmental protection, 'sustainable' development, community cohesion, and the economic viability of small businesses. However, unlike most modernist approaches to agricultural and environmental problem solving, this 'critical cultural dialogue' places prime importance on learning about one's own culture. It emphasizes the 'reading' or examination of cultural forms as 'texts', an analytical process that can inform us about the power dynamics and social intricacies of particular places and environments. This 'information' is meant to be continually debated and negotiated in group dialogue. Thus, it is not to be seen as 'factual' so much as intellectually, materially, and emotionally useful for the en-situ purposes of communally constructing a dynamic learning culture that is, for instance, more devoted to the care of local people, land, and community. For agricultural geography, this is, indeed, a new kind of public education, a new kind of learning.

Conceptual Background

My idea for this communal or civic learning through agriculture is the result of a merging of concepts and theories from a wide variety of academic sources. I can identify three separate bodies of literature with which this research is linked. These are the broad literatures of small-scale farming, of public education, and of development and planning. Each of these broad bodies of literature border each other in interesting ways: Public education and planning can be met in the realm of “critical pedagogy.” Small scale farming and planning find an intriguing meeting place in works of “development critique,” particularly the postmodern development critique. Finally, small-scale farming and public education bump into each other in texts that explore the rather novel concept of “civic agriculture.”

Thus, there are seemingly three “realms” of literature – those of critical pedagogy, development critique, and civic agriculture – with which we must be familiar in order to begin the negotiation of a locally-engaged or civic culture rooted in agriculture. Naturally, these “realms” are fluid, dynamic, not easily encased. I call attention to them here in order to explain most clearly where I am headed in this research. However, I do recognize that if I am to help South Jersey residents sow the seeds of a new attentiveness to land and place through this work, it will ultimately be through their ideas and not through abstract theories articulated in academic literature that we arrive at this ‘garden consciousness’. Yet, let me briefly introduce the specific “realms” of literature I have identified so that later we will have a starting place from which to begin to examine their utility in helping South Jerseyans see the situation of the Garden State through new lenses.

The idea of civic agriculture

I have already discussed my desire to examine the civic *potentials* of agriculture, but I have not introduced the concept of “civic agriculture.” In many ways, these two phrases are one in the same, yet I find it helpful to examine the already coined expression “civic agriculture” to see what others have meant and *want* to mean in using the term. “Civic

agriculture,” as defined by sociologist Thomas A. Lyson, is a catch-phrase for the whole array of activities and types of farming business that emerge within local-based food systems and that are manifestly related to the social and economic development of local communities. Thus, the term might include activities such as farmer’s markets, rural bed-and-breakfasts, pick-your-own schemes, community gardens, and community-supported agriculture (CSA). Civic agriculture emphasizes direct producer-to-consumer marketing and pays attention to the site-specific knowledge of farmers. We see this kind of work as alternative in that such activities provide a different kind of food production/distribution/consumption scheme than we get from (conventional) industrial production and multinational food corporations. Supporters of civic agriculture talk about ‘relocalizing’ food systems, orienting toward local markets first (with possible adaptation to regional or national markets) and, although civic agriculture is not (often) espoused as a way to challenge or threaten (conventional) industrial agriculture and food production, it is seen as a way to ameliorate local troubles that may have arisen out of the inequities of global corporate capitalism. As Lyson writes, “communities that nurture local systems of agricultural production and food marketing as one part of a diversified economic development plan can gain greater control over their economic destinies. They can also enhance the level of interaction among their residents in order to contribute to rising levels of civic welfare, revitalize rural landscapes, improve environmental quality, and promote long-term sustainability” (Lyson 2000, 4).

These ideas are important, yet I propose to go further – or perhaps deeper – into what can be meant by civic agriculture. Fortunately, I am not alone in this intention. In “Place, work and civic agriculture: Common fields for cultivation,” Laura DeLind presents some concerns with the current trends in academic discourse on civic agriculture. Specifically, she offers a warning about allowing the language of market relations and the capital economy to define the players/agents in civic agriculture. DeLind writes that peoples’ principal identities “are still framed by the economic or commercial transaction” (i.e. producers and consumers) and that, although there is nothing inherently wrong with local commerce or local capitalism, “there is a danger in equating production and consumption, responsible or otherwise, with

citizenship” (DeLind 2002, 218). To assume that active civic engagement will arise out of a locally-based food system is mistaken. We must plan for and work towards the socio-cultural and political changes we want to affect through agriculture.

Inasmuch as the relationships in small-scale farming do go beyond the logic of the marketplace, DeLind sees the potential of agriculture to beget a more cooperative and holistic way of life. True, small-scale agriculture is a source of individual entrepreneurship, but it may also be conceived as a purposeful public obligation through which collective identity is formed and a democratic political culture, alert to environmental responsibility, is built. Thus, through the negotiation process I would like to explore the possibility of taking civic agriculture in a direction that does not negate the economic but that advances new eco-cultural and perhaps eco-spiritual opportunities for community cohesion. In this vein I am looking at agriculture as a holistic or broadened framework for a (culturally and spiritually significant) pedagogical process.

Critical Pedagogy

I referred to this pedagogical process above as ‘critical cultural dialogue’ and I alluded to a potential link with postmodern thought. I labeled it such because both critical and postmodern theorists take a view of knowledge as socially constructed and conceive of learning as a “process of receiving and creating communicative messages or ‘discourses’ about the social world” (Kilgore 2001, 54). Yet I am very aware that the postmodern outlook has been criticized as both apolitical and nihilistic and that for many scholars the term ‘postmodern’ will forever remain pejorative. In addition, ‘post-modern’ does not often play well in local community, yet the idea of local community negotiating truth might make perfect sense, and this is a kind of post-modern idea. For this reason, I find it better to be descriptive than label-ready. Indeed, the pedagogical process about which I speak could really be given a number of different names. One might conceive of this pedagogical process alternately as a sort of meta-postmodern (modern-postmodern) dialectics, as a way to enter what Edward Soja calls “thirdspace.” By “thirdspace” Soja means a “space of extraordinary

openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible, uncombinable” (Soja 1996, 5). Hence, it is simultaneously a convergence of a diversity of particular perspectives and a breaking down of a series of confining boundaries. Consequently, my current model for community learning, the January 2005 forum, "Re-connecting Our Lives to the Land," tried just this by seeking out people of all professions, ages, and backgrounds as participants. At its best, one might say this pedagogical form of community dialogue is an attempt to see our world from *every* angle.

Hence, through a certain public ‘education’ based in ‘critical cultural dialogue,’ academics and community people begin to navigate truth together. Just as in Edward Soja’s “thirdspace,” strict universal laws are replaced by plurality and searching throughout all stages of reflection. Yet, the attempt here is not to get rid of all universality in thinking. I am aware that in describing this pedagogical form for the purposes of agricultural geography here, the idea of cultural dialogue itself is actually displayed as somewhat universal. Although there is no one pattern for dialogue there is an over-arching design involved that seems to be applicable in many situations. So, although we may test out this new kind of applied, reflexive, agri-*cultural* geography in one specific context (i.e. Southern New Jersey) the successes and failures evident in this one context can be useful to others.

Critiquing “development”

At first it may seem rather daunting to examine the utility of this new kind of agricultural geography in terms of its ability to actually help address some of the issues of landscape destruction and ecological in-attentiveness that I highlight in *South Jersey under the Stars*. However, we find an intriguing manner of approach in some of the most recent dialogue regarding the revisioning of “development” or the “development project.” We find that within the postmodern push for situatedness, contextuality, and non-totalizing knowledge claims, top-down strategies have been de-emphasized. Development theorists have well

entrenched themselves in the paradigm of local participation and participatory action research; many critiques now focus on the need to give control of development back to communities and theorists now identify “bottom-up” education as the crux for returning power in development to local people. Furthermore, regarded as particularly important for future development are local, alternative, or otherwise marginalized ways-of-knowing about the environment and nature. And, hence, development theorists have begun to tackle ‘new’ environmental and social concerns such as local self-sufficiency and sustainability, ‘appropriate’ technology, and the question of indigenous ecological knowledge.

Through all of this work we can find significant linkages with the topic of small-scale farming as it is seen in South Jersey, but perhaps a good starting point for dialogue comes from the newfound emphasis on marginalized ways-of-knowing. The current conventional agro-industrial system has been criticized for its destructive obfuscation of local land-based knowledge, of food origins, and of the political, social, and ecological implications of agriculture. To the extent that this is true, people in local areas such as South Jersey could find their agricultural understandings incomplete and their connectedness to the land distorted. A revisioning of the concept of “development” or of “growth” that recognizes learning as the ultimate source of power inevitably could work to return such “lost” agricultural knowledge back to the producers and consumers. This could be true on any level – first or third world – and in any locality – urban or rural. The idea is that as people become more attentive to agriculture (and its situation locally, regionally, globally) they regain the power to act in ways that appreciate the ‘goods’ of ecological integrity and socio-economic sustainability, to name a few, as well as the central concept of “wholeness.” This can be seen even in places where agriculture remains a minor part of the local economy because, as the systems thinking approach teaches us, it is the cause for attentiveness itself that is most crucial here. Moreover, if such development theories hold, we might claim that in engaging themselves in bottom-up processes of learning and “knowledge” formation, people are taking part in self-reflective community-based activity. This kind of activity certainly should

enliven the desire for active citizenship within one's own 'human scaled' realm, one's own homeplace.

Research Questions

Accordingly, I look at agriculture as a potential venue for community cohesion, for a re-newed ethos of place, for a certain (globally-sensitive) kind of localism. The notion of agriculture as a matter of wholeness, becomes, at once, a concrete and theoretical site from which might emerge entire communities that are truly learning, through dialogue and negotiation, to live *in* place, to 'inhabit' (as DeLind explains), to 'become native' (as farmer Wes Jackson pronounces), or to 'dwell' (in Heidegger's sense of the term) (DeLind 2002, Curry 2002, Hayes-Conroy 2005). Because I desire such a holistic, collaborative management of the 'truths' of agriculture, I have organized a series of research questions to aid my inquiry into effective linkages between public education and small-scale farming. The working questions together satisfy the requirements of the problem statement of the thesis. That is, they work together to ask: To what *practical* extent do South Jersey residents find legitimacy with the suggestion that we can use local agriculture as a foundation for deepening our sense of place and stewardship in the county? The word 'practical' is emphasized as a reminder that I am testing both methods and concepts with this research. The following four questions were designed such that engagement with each, in turn, may enlighten the central methodological and conceptual concerns of this thesis as they pertain to the South Jersey region.

- (a) What *is* a "substantive" attentiveness to "place" and what does small-scale farming have to do with it in South Jersey?
- (b) To what extent does higher, adult, or public education in the region seek to promote attentiveness to county agro-ecology?
- (c) What are the paths and barriers to a cultural politics rooted in regional agriculture?

- (d) To what extent does and can the pedagogical approach of adult education in the region encourage cultural self-reflection?

Direction and Outline of Thesis

In order to begin to explore these questions concerning agriculture in South Jersey it would seem important that we are aware of the current situation facing agriculture both regionally and globally. I have already stated that the “modernist goals” of this research might include objectives like environmental protection, sustainable development, community cohesion, and the economic viability of small businesses. The debate in terms of any environmental, economic, or social sustainability in agriculture often centers on the anti-local tendencies of ‘abstraction’ inherent in industrial forms of food production. There is much to be said and argued here. For the sake of brevity, I have focused on the dynamics of power and control within conventional, industrial systems. All small-scale farms today are, to a greater or lesser extent, under the pressure of the ‘giants’, the large corporations of the agro-industry. Although the land or the farms themselves may not have been taken over, today’s agro-industry controls many of the components of the farming process, which were once under the power of the small farmer. Today fertility and soil maintenance, seed replication, sources of energy, and food processing, for example, have all been appropriated by the industrial corporations (Goodman et al. 1987). These processes, and much of the knowledge that goes along with their practice, have thus been dislocated from the farm. This has been said to cause, or perhaps to be driven by, a mentality of ‘abstraction’ that is unable to distinguish one place, person, or creature from another. As a result, agriculture is now, at least in part, said to be under the control of the forces of a global market economy, which is not attuned to the social, economic, or environmental intricacies of each individual local place of cultivation (Berry 1990).

Yet, this thesis will not seek, outright, to refute or assert the claims that such conventional industrial procedures and a linked corporate consumer culture are undermining

the ability of farms and of agriculturally-attentive communities to be environmentally sustainable, socially viable, or economically feasible. I point out the situation here simply to call attention to the fact that in each given locality (in each local community) the corporate agro-industry will undoubtedly have an effect on the civic potentials of agriculture. However, I leave it up to each individual community to negotiate the tensions between industrial and non-industrial, between the global market economy and local economic interests, and between abstracted and place-based forms of knowledge and learning. Along similar lines, this thesis does not seek to assert (or refute) the idea that the ‘small-scale,’ the ‘place-based,’ and the ‘local’ are inherently more ecologically-sound, socially equitable or “sustainable.” Of course, I am aware that many people both in and out of South Jersey would defend such a claim, and I am further aware that they may be ‘correct’ on certain levels. Yet ultimately I see that the truth or falsity of such a claim is a topic that must be explored in dialogue. My reason for this has to do with the ideological value claims that are often linked to the ways that we talk about and think about localness and the small-scale. I see that in any value system there are both progressive elements and reactive (potentially regressive) elements. In planning, then, the way that we can make use of our values without becoming *regressive* is by allowing for a system of questioning or interrogation that is coming from all sides. Therefore, to reiterate an already made point, planning must start with a certain kind of critical public education.

Accordingly, to begin to analyze this new public education, I have organized this thesis to accomplish three goals in sequence: First, I explore the thought process that can be involved in what I call applied, agri-*cultural* geography. Second, I explore the methods of research coming out of that thought process. And third, I apply those methods to a particular local situation – Burlington County, Southern New Jersey. Hence, this thesis begins with a chapter in which I develop my theory followed by a chapter on methodology, and finally two chapters dedicated to the analysis of my empirical research.

Chapter Two, Sustainable Geographies of Agriculture, works as an assessment of the thought processes inherent to the study of agriculture – specifically, to agricultural

geography. Here I examine the ways in which agricultural geography has dealt with the question of the wholeness of agriculture. I look at how geographers have made sense of farm and food as sources of ecological and social information. I begin with a historical overview of the evolution of relevant thought from the beginning days of the sub-field of agricultural geography. I spend more time exploring recent trends, drawing out changes in thought through the 1990's and early 2000's that may be important when I later test out the efficacy of agriculture as a medium or framework for cultural learning. The idea of *cultural* agricultural geography (or *agri-cultural* geography) takes the forefront as I explore the potentials of budding realms of inquiry which seem specifically pertinent to questions on land stewardship and 'sustainability'.

Chapter Three, A New Space for Learning, is an in-depth exploration of the methodology that parallels the disciplinary theories developed in Chapter Two. This chapter delves more deeply into the idea of cultural learning and how it might interplay with action – planning – on the local level. If action research and community learning are to be met in a holistic conception of agriculture then we must explore what exactly this means for planning the future of sustainable communities. To do this I first apply theories from the postmodern critique of development to make the case for local dialogue (on agriculture) as a tool for both data collection and social education. I argue that through the process of critical dialogue (in which we question our understandings of agriculture and our current eco-social reality) communities gain the skills necessary to move forward in ways that are more attentive to the idea of *wholeness* and to the ecological integrity and sustainability of people, land, and community. I move from here to introduce the particular method of “Deep-Dialogue,” explaining how it works to encourage (radical) openness and critical thinking. I also offer the suggestion that community colleges provide ideal sites for the application of these “deep” dialogic methods and I explain how I have applied dialogue-based methods in my interactions with South Jersey educators both in and outside of the community college setting. To clarify, these dialogue-based methods include first individual (mostly semi-structured) interviews and conversations, second, focus-group interviews and other group encounters, and third, the

January 8 community forum – the largest ‘conversation,’ styled much like a public meeting. Finally, I end the chapter both by defending the choice of Burlington County as a site for my investigation and offering a brief review of the current realities of landscape and agriculture in the county today.

Chapter Four, *Dialogue in Burlington County*, begins the analysis of my empirical research – the case study of the Burlington County area of Southern New Jersey. I use the sketch of the region offered at the end of Chapter Three as a background to my in-depth interviews. I begin by analyzing how my various respondents react to the topic of ‘civic agriculture,’ searching for patterns in reactions and considering what these patterns reveal about my respondents’ visions for South Jersey’s future and the use of agricultural dialogue in the visioning process. Next I offer a different sort of in-depth account of agricultural dialogue in action, paying attention to the ability of dialogue to open spaces of ‘common ground’ among potentially divergent groups. Here I also provide testimony for how a focus on agriculture can allow individuals and communities greater analytical understandings of the meanings and emotions they attach to ‘place’ and life in ‘place.’ Finally, the chapter ends with a presentation of an introductory vision for South Jersey, woven from the declarations of county educators and local residents. The expression of the vision is followed by an account of pragmatic strategies for action that also emerge from the visioning process. A highlight here is the January 8, 2005 community forum, “Re-connecting our lives to the land,” which grew out of the beginning dialogues of this thesis. In expressing the vision I also take heed of the limitations to cultural transformation that are identified through the visioning process.

Chapter Five, *Towards Intimate Knowing*, takes off where Chapter Four ends, on the issue of limits. Here I propose that the topics and/or styles of dialogue that I have used in my empirical research may not move far enough in their push for self or cultural reflection. That is, my questioning through a deep kind of dialogue has not been ‘deep’ enough in one sense. I use Chapter Five to develop an alternative analytic through which to analyze Burlington County culture and agriculture. I show how this analytic can be put to use for both written and verbalized cultural ‘texts’ with the implication that self and cultural reflection in South

Jersey could eventually take this route. I argue that this analytic, though not sufficient in itself, could provide an important missing link for communities attempting to transform themselves through holistic, agriculturally-based learning.

The conclusions of this thesis are broad. In South Jersey this thesis presents tools for transformation in the form of intermingling dialogues, a primary dialogue worked out in Chapter Four and a secondary dialogue worked out in Chapter Five. While the dialogues remain open to interpretation from local communities, they do contain general underlying themes, important to grappling with “wholeness” through agriculture. Both dialogues also demonstrate, in their own ways, the possibility of exploratory engagement with both the emotional and spiritual realms of local life. The dialogues couple this exploratory engagement of emotions with a critical analysis of knowledge, beliefs, and opinions about the local area, and in this way, grow to be both visionary and realistic tools for planning. More specifically, the intermingling dialogues presented in this thesis, work to help set up alternative mental frameworks for the analytical and literal reconstruction of local society and place. Yet, although both the primary and the secondary dialogue have been built to be ‘neutral’ or ‘unanimous,’ that does not hide the fact that many of the key players of the dialogues today in South Jersey consider themselves as members of one or another rather exclusive circles. With the advancement of the dialogues now in their hands, local educators and residents will have to find ways to expand discussion to wider social circles.

CHAPTER TWO: Sustainable Geographies of Agriculture

“A good farmer . . . is a cultural product; he is made by a sort of training, certainly, in what his time imposes or demands, but he is also made by generations of experience. This essential experience can only be accumulated, tested, preserved, handed down in settled households, friendships, and communities that are deliberately and carefully native to their own ground, in which the past has prepared the present and the present safeguards the future.”

Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America* (1977, 45)

Introduction

I have described in the introduction my intent to conduct a ‘visioning’ project with South Jersey educational leaders to reveal local viewpoints and attitudes regarding the future of ‘place’ in Burlington County. Specifically, I ask educators to comment on the suggestion that civic bonds and a desire for stewardship could be formed in South Jersey by initiating a new dialogue that leads local people to discuss the relevance of agriculture to their lives. The inspiration for this project has, in part, come from the realm of Community Economic Development, which recognizes the importance of including issues of identity – of culture, values, emotions, and spirituality – in planning. Yet, I want to begin here not by assessing ideas from community-based planning but by evaluating certain tools from the realm of agricultural geography that may be useful in the logistics of this ‘visioning’ process. In the coming pages I explore how trends in geographic inquiry on agriculture have led to a broadened conception of agriculture as a phenomenon that is highly relevant to the daily lives and cultural identities of all individuals. Part of this broadening includes coming to think of agriculture as not simply farming, but rather the whole process of nutrient/caloric cycling from the cultivation of crops to the act of eating itself. By learning how geography arrived at such a holistic appreciation of agriculture, we get a sense of how local communities can do the same. The idea, then, is to apply such agriculture-based modes of thought in community dialogue to invite critical reflection about the relative ‘sustainability’ of our modern ways of life.

The title of this chapter, “Sustainable Geographies of Agriculture,” should be a clue to what I intend to put forth by examining agriculture in terms of its relevance to sense of place and local community development. The kind of attentiveness to land and place implied in a holistic appreciation of agriculture seems to tread hand in hand with the idea of “sustainability” in ecological as well as economic and social terms. That is, the desire to live in ways that can nourish a ‘place’ and carry on its communities seems inherent to the acknowledgement of wholeness in agriculture. Recognizing wholeness in agriculture involves recognizing how social disconnection from the land (as a main source of

nourishment) can lead to ecologically and socially insensitive forms of development and growth. Of course I am aware that today mention of a concern for “sustainability” is met with both compulsory nods of agreement and despondent sighs for an opinion that is not ideologically overloaded. Indeed, the 90s buzzword ‘sustainability’ has become rather overworked, having been recognized, appropriated, and exploited by groups as divergent as neo-liberal think tanks and the *fair-trade* movement. However, few would deny the general suspicion that we may be living in ways that are not viable for the long-term. Thus, here I will not attempt to define ‘sustainability’ with any finality. I enter into this investigation recognizing that there is a rather nebulous ‘goal’ at the heart of the matter that will need to be defined and *refined* within particular contexts. I search for tools within agricultural geography that seem to have practical application in helping to establish, define, and refine sustainable local ways of life.

I focus on the ‘local’ for two important reasons. First and most basically, the local is where I have found an entryway to work – in the small-scale or community setting in Southern New Jersey. Second, I focus on the local because I find that human attachment or affection can be found quite readily here. That is, a number of people in the varied communities of South Jersey, for mixed reasons, have found a sense of belonging or identity that is linked with the local area. Incidentally, I focus on the small-scale farm for the same two reasons; the small farm is principally what exists and what is available to research in South Jersey, and the small farm is also what has come to be valued by local people on a number of different levels. Some of this valuing, of both the small-scale farm and the ‘local’ in general, is probably linked with romanticized, idealized, or otherwise reactionary ways of appreciating ‘place’ in South Jersey. Such valuations may tend to obscure harsher realities of the people, land, and community here. To be sure, this thesis is not meant to focus on or valorize the small-scale and local for the sake of smallness and localism themselves. Instead, I wish to point out the mixed values that have been attached to local people, land, and community so that the people of South Jersey can begin to question these values together, pulling apart the elements that

are progressive from those that seem more reactionary, in order to move forward with a communally-meaningful, sustainable attentiveness to place.

Needless to say, such affecting of 'real-world' change requires a multi-faceted approach, and the search for such an approach in agricultural geography necessitates at least a brief examination of the overall history of farm-relevant research that has emerged within the discipline. Thus, I will explore geographic inquiries into agriculture since their initial stages. Throughout this exploration we need to be aware of both generalities and particulars. Ideas of classification, modeling, and spatial analysis weave in and out of different phases within agricultural geography; early emphases on the environment re-emerge in later times; geographers assess farming as an occupation, then as a way of life, then again as an occupation. Indeed, there is much movement, much tension, many ins and outs in this 'story' of agricultural geography, which are relevant to the examination of the civic (eco-social) potentials of a holistic understanding of agriculture. We will see that agricultural geography runs through five clear stages (albeit with overlaps) that are delineated by the foremost causative factor seen to be affecting agriculture; these are, in order, environment, economics, behavior(alism), political economy (post-productivism), and cultural economy.

Of course, some theories, methods, and concepts we might ultimately assess to be more relevant than others. The story of agricultural geography to be told is a story through economic, behavioral, and political perspectives, but this story lingers in the end in the realm of the cultural. We linger here because we are obliged to: *agri-culture* proceeds from culture. As farmer Wendell Berry writes, "Character and community – that is, culture in the broadest, richest sense – constitute, just as much as nature, the source of food. Neither nature nor people alone can produce human sustenance, but only the two together, culturally wedded" (Berry in Peterson 200, 95). What does it mean, then, to 'linger' on culture? As a start, it means allowing the subject of social science itself to be seen not only in terms of social institutions and practices, political structures, and economic interests, but also in terms of symbolic meanings, the formation of identities, and the creation of deeply-rooted belief systems. In addition, paying attention to culture is about focusing on critical strategies for

change and transformation. Accordingly, I seek to analyze a nascent ‘cultural turn’ in agricultural geography as to the possibilities it offers for speaking to the holism of agriculture in an applied, pragmatic, and adaptable way. Nonetheless, paying attention to culture here does not negate the importance of the approaches that come before. Any ‘cultural turning’ that I encourage within agricultural geography is a turning that does not erase past approaches but rather embraces them and ultimately draws a rather collective response. Thus, with this exploration I anticipate a transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing that will be useful to us as we begin to envision the future of South Jersey.

What Went Before

Beginnings and definitions

Agriculture is arguably humankind’s most fundamental and important connection with the natural world. Yet, geographical inquiry into the realm of the agriculturist did not emerge until the end of the 18th Century, and even then, only haphazardly, slowly gaining momentum. Geographical concerns with agriculture through the 19th Century took a regional approach, largely looking into physical conditions as a cause for variation in agricultural areas (Johnston 1986). Some studies in the late 1800s nudged toward making statistical analyses of crop regions, but these were of the most basic level. The discipline had to wait until the early 1900s for any observable trend in literature on agriculture (Gregor 1970)^a.

As agricultural geography began to be conscious of itself as a field, there was much debate on exactly what that field should include -- what distinguished it as a distinct domain? For the purposes of this research I find that Geographer Albert Faucher, writing in 1946 and 1949, is quite useful. Faucher appears to have most pointedly identified the path (or paths) the topic of agriculture was to take within the discipline over the greater part of the 20th century. He identifies two trends emerging – what might be read as two separate ‘agricultural geographies.’ One is attentive to “ the nature of the [agricultural] products, the economic

conditions for their obtainment, the way of life of the cultivators, the characteristics and transformations of the rural landscape . . .” The other is concerned with the “world distribution of crops, their volume of production, their use, and their movement” (Gregor 1970, 6). This latter trend Faucher calls the “economic geography of agriculture” and labels as quantitative and statistical. The former he dubs “agrarian geography” and labels as qualitative and more in-line with human geography. Though there may have been overlap between these two ‘paths,’ in general what Faucher seems to have identified here is the breaking off of rural – ‘agrarian’ – geography, which becomes a field of its own with economic, human, and physical concerns, not necessarily related to the farm, and agricultural geography, which retains strong linkages with economic geography until recent^b.

Of course, in some ways it seems counter-productive to point to ‘breaks’ in lines of thought when what we are ultimately in search of is a *holistic* approach within geography to modern ecological and social matters. And, in reality, there are no definitive ‘breaks’ to be charted. Over the last half of the 20th Century and especially in the beginning years of the 21st Century, arguments over the extent to which geographical discussions of the farm and farmer should be entwined humanistic concerns, natural science concerns, or economic concerns crop up in numerous forms from within both rural and agricultural geography. However, it is important to point out the ‘blind spots’ which have materialized in geographic theory and methods as a result of the following of certain ‘paths’ or trends of research within the discipline. I turn now to the identified field of ‘agricultural geography’ to examine internal themes, theories, and methods more closely. We can compare this later to ‘rural geography,’ which is important to our concern for the farm (particularly the small family farm as found in South Jersey), but does not tackle the theme of farming so closely.

The geographers who wrote assessments of or introductions to agricultural geography throughout the 1970s and 80s, were in agreement over the ‘definition’ of the field. Gregor (1970), Grigg (1984), Pacione (1986), Tarrant (1974) and Johnston (1986), all describe

^a Though a handful of early geographers might be sited, Krzynowski is specifically noted for beginning the trend of geographical writings in agriculture with his 1911 article on “Scientific Positions of Agricultural Geography” (Gregor 1970).

agricultural geography as the study of the areal variation of agriculture over the earth's surface. However, the approaches to this study, as implied above, were diverse. Description on crop-by-crop basis was common. Others took a historical approach, looking at diffusion of crops and evolution of cultivation methods (including Sauer 1969). In addition, researchers throughout the 20th Century were eager to create detailed categorizations that marked out the world's major agricultural zones (Johnston 1986). Such focus on schemes of classification or typology is important. As calculation and measurability are accentuated, we can witness how the focus on classification first, defines agricultural geography's major themes of environment, economy, and society and second, explains why the economy was given a privileged site.

The Environment

Generally, I am hesitant to make an explicit distinction between 'physical' geography and 'human' geography, but I will reference the distinction here only to point out that agricultural geography may really provide a link between the two realms. In his 1970 *Geography of Agriculture: Themes in research*, Howard Gregor writes "no other branch of human geography concerns itself so directly with the physical environment as agricultural geography" (Gregor 1970, 31). The role of the environment was the first and is still a crucial topic of concern to agricultural geographers. Especially in regard to the delineation of regions, early geographers paid foremost attention to aspects of the physical environment like climatic variations, soil and land types, and hydrologic conditions.

Yet, within agricultural geography, the role of the environment quickly turns to emphasize more 'human' questions, specifically, how farmers have adjusted farming operations to environmental conditions. This is not surprising given the push in science and technology of the time. Focusing on growing season length, crop varieties, and new technologies, geographers like M. Biehl (1958) and P. Deffontaines (1957) offered explanations of the spatial layout of crop production. This kind of work seems to have

^b This is not to say that rural geography came out of this 'agrarian' geographic work, just that the streams of

relevance to contemporary concepts like food sheds and food miles, which, as Deffontaines points out, will shift according to stages in the ‘farming year.’ As we later discuss place-based ideas like ‘local eating’ in South Jersey, it will be important to understand such limitations to regional farming and local food supply. In addition, J.E. Spenser (1966) gives special attention to the notion of the farming year, focusing on climatically determined ‘seasonality,’ a focus, which, in terms of this research, invites environmental questions about the local importance of seasonal *agri-cultural* rounds. Agricultural seasons change with climate and agro-technology and they may or may not be culturally visible. What does this say about people’s connectedness to the land-ecology?

Of course, with concepts like seasonal movements of centers of supply, and focus on population and markets, we see the dominant themes in agricultural geography moving closer to the realm of the economy. Even within what Michael Pacione refers to as the ‘environmental’ theoretical perspective of agricultural geography, the emphasis is often on inputs and energy efficiency (efficiency seen as important in monetary terms) (Pacione 1986)[°]. When surveys or introductions to agricultural geography are published, such as Leslie Symons *Agricultural Geography* (1967, 1979), chapters that include discussion of aspects of the physical environment are often posed as simply examinations of a type of economic constraint (Symons 1979).

The Economy

In his 1974 book *Agricultural Geography*, John Tarrant criticizes the description of farming as a ‘way of life,’ arguing that this “belies the strong economic forces which underlie most forms of agricultural production” (Tarrant 1974, 11). Tarrant goes on to explain that although the economic facts of agricultural life are not deterministic, they are considerable; they set the limits of cultivation and they shape the farmers’ freedoms of choice. Tarrant

agricultural inquiry took two forms that eventually seemed to fit themselves into these defined fields.

[°] Still, we do find research that approaches man-environment relations in an opposite direction, not in terms of what the environment does to the farm, but what the farm does to the environment. The geographers E. Fels, J.T. Curtis, and C.W. Thornthwaite, discuss human alterations of microclimate, climate, and landform, often referencing or alluding to George Perkins Marsh’s work, *Man and Nature* – a pioneering work, well-known to environmentalists (Gregor 1970).

writes that recognizing economic controls (as well as obvious environmental constraints) implies that there is a theoretical 'best' solution to the problems of agricultural production, and this idea is what guides geographic inquiry in the field, although the dynamic nature of agriculture prevents any one 'solution' from being 'perfect' for all time. The task for agricultural geographers, then, according to Tarrant, is to try to establish general laws on the economy of agricultural production. Referencing William Bunge's proposition that although features of the earth appear unique, they have important features in common, Tarrant aimed to establish hypotheses and models that could be tested with empirical study (Tarrant 1974).

Although this is just one geographer's take on the task of agricultural geography, in general Tarrant's emphasis on economic forces, laws, models, and measurability reflect a paradigm of economic rationality that characterized agricultural geography from quite early on in the 20th Century. This focus on the 'economic' was probably due to the fact that the dominant rural ideology of this time was one of economic rationality, focusing on productivity, efficiency, and intensification. Farmers were the key figures in the rural economy, and ideas of *agricultural adjustment* (referenced from England) fastened the farms of the developed world on to a "technological and economic 'treadmill,'" which was powered by a neo-classical economic ideology (Ilbery 1998,13-14). On such a treadmill, the 'career' of farmer (or more likely, farm manager) loses a certain distinctiveness, becoming subsequently more comparable with other "occupational" choices for money-making in the world – accountant, stockbroker, lawyer, consultant. Such an ideology also leads, perhaps, to normalization or regimentation in ways of thinking – 'boxed' methods of analysis, modeling, and other highly structured ways of studying the farm.

Interestingly, one grand influence on the economic paradigm in agricultural geography was a 19th Century agricultural economist and farmer by the name of J.H. Von Thunën. Von Thunën was interested in determining the effect of transportation on the distributions of farming systems around urban markets. Holding all other factors beyond transportation constant, Von Thunën found that farmers would (or should, theoretically) work less intensively the further they were from the urban market. This created a pattern of

concentric zones of farming intensity and types around the market. Later on in the 20th Century, agricultural geographers ‘discovered’ the theory and began to search for evidence of the Von Thunën model on scales ranging from the individual farm, to region, continent, and even globe (Gregor 1970). Others referenced the Von Thunën theory in order to point out its contradictions. Undeniably, research in agricultural geography was largely influenced by a persistent debate over the extent to which Von Thunën zonation could be discerned in the landscape (Gregor 1970).

From about 1970 onward, the dominant ideology of economic rationality also seemed to influence not only an emphasis on structured modeling but also an emphasis on the urgency of research – a new paradigm of crisis (to perhaps be solved by science and technology). Indeed, the later era of economistic agricultural geography was characterized by a growing concern with the ‘world food crisis.’ Geographers make frequent reference to a concern for the earth’s ability to feed its growing population. Linking their work to the early Malthusian theories and the later work of Ester Boserup, agricultural geographers turn their interest to ideas of modernization in agriculture, macro-scale survey of world food supply, and actions of the state in manipulating markets (Johnston 1986). For example, in the second edition to her *Agricultural Geography*, Leslie Symons indicates a new widespread attention to the question of how to feed the world’s population, and her chapters are posed in the context of a “hungry world” (Symons 1979). Such a position is particularly important because this emphasis on the world food problem expanded well beyond both the discipline of geography and the walls of the academy as a whole. The sudden concern for feeding the globe’s growing population became a way to encourage the continuation of an ideology in agriculture that legitimized an increased emphasis on intensification – industrialization and mechanization – in agriculture (Berry 1977). Recognizing such connections between academic ideology and ‘real world’ practice is valuable if we are to use agriculture to discuss the general effects of ‘industrialization’ on community in regions like Southern New Jersey. Also, although the world food crisis seems now to be on the academic back burner, the issue

of producing enough food to feed local, regional, and global populations remains, of course, a vital topic to be examined and negotiated.

By the end of the 1970s, another concern began to take shape that would distract from some of the discussion of the world food crisis (as well as potentially add to some of its literature). This was a concern for the sociological and personal constraints that influence the spatial distribution of agricultural activities. Many agricultural geographers were dissatisfied with the exclusivity of the economic paradigm, which emphasized topics like productivity, optimal land-use patterns, and economies of scale. Normative economic models, they argued, failed to explain agricultural patterns because they characterized the farmer as the 'economic man,' expecting him (or her!) to act in a rational manner in regard to profit maximization (Pacione 1986). By framing the discussion of agriculture (or here man's husbandry of the land for economic gain) as part of an overall economic geography of man's work, geographers were overlooking a third control on the spatial variation of agriculture: the socio-personal environment of farmer's decision making (Symons 1979).

The Socio-Personal

In 1970, Gregor writes that the view of farming as "a way of life as well as an occupation . . . has claimed a small but growing share of interest among researchers in agricultural geography" (Gregor 1970, 72). At this time a few geographers were recognizing the importance of influences on the (macro or micro) spatial variation of agricultural activities beyond the environment and the economy. They were concerned not only with the reaction of the individual farmer to his 'occupation' but also how his decisions were shaped by factors such as nationality, race, religion, and psychology. By the end of the decade, interest in these questions had grown into a recognizable 'third' theoretical approach to the study of the spatial variation of agriculture.

In reality, the characterization of this third theoretical approach as 'socio-personal' or 'socio-cultural' is somewhat of a misnomer, disguising that the trend away from purely economic models in agricultural geography was by and large a trend towards behavioral

geography. The behavioral approach seeks to show how attitudes and assumptions affect the decision-making processes of the farmer, and moves from economic deterministic models to a recognition that farmers may not see the environment as it is (or as environmental or economic sciences sees it) (Grigg 1984). Still, within the behavioral approach, attempts to categorize, classify, and model are foundational. Here, the models may be described as 'satisficer' models (incorporating aspects such as desire for leisure and social considerations to 'satisfy' all of the farmers aspirations, not simply 'optimizing' for maximum profit) (Pacione 1986)^d.

Because it represents the first widespread attempt by agricultural geography to deal with the socio-cultural issues of farm life, the behavioral approach merits some attention. The unpredictability of socio-personal factors affecting the decision-making of farmers and thus, ultimately, the spatial variation of farming activity, causes problems for the researcher. Geographers end up devising a number of quantitative, model-fed research approaches to explain decision-making on the farm. Game theory, which involves ideas of choice and strategizing in meeting with competition, was utilized as a normative solution to making decisions on the farm (Gregor 1970). Its application has been to examine ideas of risk-avoidance and similar issues and has even been employed to explore deviations from the land-use patterns of the Von Thunën model. Other models within the behavioral approach have focused more on the spread or diffusion of agricultural innovation. Often these studies concerned themselves with interpersonal information flows, and attempted to divide 'adopters' of various innovations into different categories to be studied in terms of locational, economic, social, and demographic properties. Such studies also stimulate interest in explaining why farmers' attitudes are what they are, instead of simply how they effect decisions. In doing so, they represent movement in agricultural theorizing towards the cultural. In an all-important step forward, geographers begin to ask what farming *means* to people.

^d Work in this field was informed by numerous geographers, of whom some of the most influential were Gould (with his early 60s work on game-theory models), Harvey (with a 1966 review of agricultural geographic theory) and Torsten Hägerstrand (with a 1967 path-breaking work on agricultural diffusion and Swedish farmers using simulation models).

Of course, there is still an inherent emphasis on the ‘universal’ science here – searching for generalizable facts that can be added to the knowledge base of western science and can be re-tested objectively in other locations. Yet, geographers throughout the century have realized that this is harder than it may seem. In fact it seems as though what may have ended the drive for behavioral approaches in geography is the fact that behavioral researchers found themselves held up by the realization that it is difficult (if not impossible) to observe human behavior ‘objectively.’

Tying Loose Ends

Viewing the pre-1980s history of agriculture within geography in terms of the three theoretical perspectives of environment, economy, and behavior certainly leaves a number of gaps. We have not dealt with, or rather, have regrouped a number of other identifiable perspectives; these might include a political and/or a political economy approach, which remained undersized, yet existent through the mid 20th Century and a historical approach emphasizing time as a dimension of geographic inquiry as seen in Carl Sauer’s 1969 *Agricultural Origins and Dispersals* (Gregor 1970, 84). Also I am particularly aware of the relevance of the sustained work of both Carl Sauer, and earlier, Vidal de la Blache, to our concern for wholeness in agriculture. Vidal’s “general geography,” which involved an attempt to understand the “personality of regions” – the ways in which people and their natural environments fuse to become an intricate *whole* – surely was a tradition that foreshadowed later trends toward wholeness in agricultural geography (Archer 1993). Building on this, Carl Sauer’s attempts to relate local identity with productive relationships with the land, and his apparent linkages between the idea of ‘culture’ and the idea of ‘land cultivation,’ offer much insight to a twenty-first century curiosity with the issue of re-connecting to the land (Parsons 1979 and Leighly 1976). As a result of such work, he has been described as a man who “never lost sight of the inseparability of man and his environment” (Hart 1964).

Beyond the examples of Sauer and Vidal, one can find a number of individual papers that do not seem to 'fit the mold' of the agricultural geography described above. An example is a paper on "Agricultural Development, Rural Social Conditions, and Landscape Beauty," presented at the Agricultural Geography Symposium in 1964 that brings up agricultural issues similar to those seen in South Jersey today. The paper recognizes trends causing agricultural retreat, or the development of family farmland, and poses the discussion of farm loss not in terms of ecological loss but rather in terms of a loss of scenic beauty (Porenus 1964). Although a focus on ecology is no doubt important to the kind of dialogue I undertake in South Jersey, the emphasis on endangered landscape beauty is significant here because of its ties with emotion and aesthetics – its humanism. Indeed, it seems to resonate more with themes of 'humanistic rural geography,' than with the economic approach to agriculture. Yet, the paper is decidedly part of the agricultural geography literature and in other ways privileges economic concerns; thus, it could be taken to represent a kind of cross-fertilization between theoretical approaches, which probably happened more often through the 1960's, 70s, and 80s than the above explication lets known.

In addition, there has been one other development within agricultural geography (beginning in the late 1970s and continuing through the 80s) that merits some brief consideration here. That is, an emerging emphasis on a *systems* approach to solving problems of farmer-environment interaction. This approach sees the farm as an 'agro-ecosystem' and looks to describe the farm processes in ecological terms such as biomass and energy flow. In many ways this is a radically different approach as it has been linked to ideas within the 'green' or 'environmentalist' movement and often has been utilized to show the ecological (and ultimately economic) inefficiency of modern industrialized agriculture (Johnston 1986). The idea of looking at the farm and its surrounding landscape as a working ecosystem, the health and integrity of which is of vital importance to humans, is a perspective that takes some time to catch on. We will see that in various forms these ideas gain some

momentum in the 90s as 'sustainability' becomes an academic buzzword and other important changes begin to take place within geography as a discipline.

Indeed, the period from the end of the 1980s through the 1990s is a time of much change within geography as a whole, within agricultural geography in particular, and most importantly, within rural agricultural areas themselves. The earlier prominence of ideas surrounding profit maximization, efficiency, and economies of scale is blocked by a growing political, environmental, and economic crisis concerning agriculture, which frames farming in a much different way. The processes and consequences of this re-framing are numerous. First, they mean a new attentiveness to theory within *rural* geography, which up until now has left agricultural theorizing to the economists and behaviorists. This will inevitably have an effect on ideas within *agricultural* geography. Also, the re-framing suggests that old categories are no longer useful (Ilbery 1998, 14). In fact, old categories must be called into question as farming enters a new era in which agricultural production is no longer as great of a priority. We now turn to look at this new agricultural era in more detail and will attempt to work out how changes in farming have lead to a simultaneous 'coming together' and expansion of the geography of agriculture. We will see that a political economy approach to agricultural geography, while present in earlier times, begins to expand as a result of post-productivist theorizing.

Modern Changes

Understanding both recent changes in agricultural geography and modern changes in world agriculture is crucial to any attempt to comprehend, analyze, or debate issues of contemporary cultural disconnection from the land and the comparative ecological-embeddedness of our ways of life. The kind of insight I offer in the coming pages is the very kind of agricultural geographic insight I have sought to weave into my work in Burlington County. By focusing on the thought processes and various kinds of connections that can be

made between people and agriculture – and broadly between humans and land – we begin to tune ourselves in to the possibilities and profits of dialogue on agriculture.

A post-productivist era

Two prominent geographers, Brian Ilbery and Ian Bowler, have assiduously sought to explain the extensive restructuring of agriculture that has unfolded in developed market economies over the last century. Ilbery and Bowler recognize this restructuring as having two phases, the first taking hold in the post-World War II period, the second in the mid 1980s. The first phase, in some form, was alluded to but not discussed directly in the previous section; it may be labeled the ‘productivist’ phase, for it has been characterized by an emphasis on increasing farm output through modernization and industrialization. The second phase, Ilbery and Bowler point out, is not in-line with this productivism, but is instead contrary. They write that agriculture in the developed world has begun a transition to a ‘post-productivist’ phase; that is, one in which the focus is on *reducing* farm output and, in general, joining agriculture together with other aims of the rural environment and economy (Ilbery 1998, 57). It is this conceiving of a new era of agriculture that most directly concerns our question of the holism of agriculture and its potential to inspire sustainable community development. Indeed, recognition of this new phase seems to have rekindled an emphasis on the ‘ecology’ or ‘human ecology’ of agriculture in various forms and for numerous reasons. These will be discussed thoroughly in this and the following section. However, first it is important to examine the way in which the ‘post-productivist’ phase has been theorized and the new categories that arise from this work.

Let us then contrast this post-productivist phase with what we understand about the productivist phase of modern agriculture. It is common knowledge that agriculture in modern times has been ‘industrialized,’ yet we seldom reflect upon the exact meanings of this term. Ian Bowler in *The Geography of Agriculture in Developed Market Economies*, points to ideas like “mechanization,” “chemical farming,” and “food manufacturing” to explain the industrialization of agriculture that characterized the productivist phase, yet these might be

considered symptoms rather than an evaluation of the term itself. Hence, Bowler goes on to offer three structural dimensions of industrialization in agriculture, which are important not only in terms of clarification but also in demonstrating the secondary consequences of the push to 'industrialize.' The first dimension is agricultural intensification – meaning growers increase capital inputs to the process of cultivation in the form of chemicals, machinery, and various biotechnologies. The second is agricultural concentration – consolidation of farms into larger but fewer units and increased sale to food-processing industries with an emphasis on contract farming. The third is agricultural specialization – the focusing of resources on a limited product range in order to obtain economies of scale, which results in less variety of products from each farm and region (Bowler 1992, 11-14). This three-pronged 'industrialization' Bowler associates with a variety of secondary consequences, of which the following seem most pertinent to this research: Intensification can be linked to increased energy use, ecosystem degradation, and agricultural indebtedness. Concentration has brought about inequalities between farm sizes and types, corporate ownership of land, and a failure of younger generations to enter farming. Finally, specialization, Bowler points out, inherently leads to an increase in the consumption of food from distant regions and/or countries (Bowler 1992, 16). All farming regions – even those that remain small scale, such as South Jersey – were influenced by such industrialization during the 20th Century.

Many of the secondary consequences of 'industrialization' that Bowler highlights have been, indeed, the impetus for portraying the entire international farm community as 'in crisis,' both economically and environmentally. Until late, researchers have perceived of the industrial transformation as one-directional, leaving little room for smaller, diverse kinds of agriculture within the 'industrial model' of high-input/output cultivation that stresses the quantity of food production. Now agricultural geographers recognize an alternate or divergent path of agriculture (the post-productivist transition described above), which many see as not supplanting but co-existing with the 'industrial' (productivist) model. The post-industrial model of agriculture is one that works towards low-volume, quality food production and is geared towards consumers who can and are willing to pay an elevated price

(Bowler 1992, 28). Furthermore, Brian Ilbery hypothesizes that within this post-productivist 'alternative' the industrial trend of agricultural concentration may be replaced by a 'dispersion' in which agricultural output is not confined to a small number of large farms and farm regions (Ilbery 1998, 70). Such dispersion makes room for smaller farms cultivating a variety of crops.

Indeed, it is within this new era of two divergent yet competing trends that the small scale or family farm is finding methods of survival. Or, put in a different way, it is within this new era that farm businesses, such as those in Southern New Jersey, are finding diverse niches within which to generate income. At any rate, we must acknowledge that the connotations associated with the term 'family farm' today may be strikingly different from the image of the 'ideal' family farm from the early/mid 1900s, within and outside of the Garden State. Today, 'hobby' farming, 'part-time' farming, and expansion of farm-related activities have increased. The term 'Alternative Farm Enterprises' or AFEs is now a buzzword signifying developments like farm shops, farm accommodations, and agri-tourism, which offer new sources of income to farm families. In addition, a budding concept, "pluriactivity," has been devised to refer to the total effort by all members of the farm family to engage in a range activities (especially off-farm employment) in order to generate income or resources from external sources and intra-familial social relations. Certainly, in the modern era of diverging productivist and post-productivist paths, it seems family farms must concern themselves with *diversification*.

In fact, Ian Bowler argues that competitive market capitalism combined with the farming family life cycle have made it such that farming families are not likely to maintain businesses based solely on full-time food production, but instead will be *forced* to diversify the income base of farms through non-cultivating enterprises and off-farm jobs (Bowler 1992, 307). Thus, the trend towards post-productivism today, in a world of still decidedly industrialized and high-output oriented agriculture, might best be explained as a simultaneous expansion and restriction on the possibilities of the small-scale farm. The small farm may look different now, may *need* to be different now, but at the same time, these differences are

what has given hope to many of those who are mourning the loss of the 'farmer' as a smallholder in the US and other developed countries. In addition, this transition in agriculture has been picked up by geographers as a new area of investigation. A mid 1980s diminished interest in agriculture, which was largely a result of the declining significance of the farming sector to the GDP of developed countries, has been replaced by a fascination with new ways of talking about the subject. As farming has changed, so too has the geographic approach to the farm (Johnston 2000).

A Re-'Newed' Agricultural Geography?

The changes within agricultural geography over the past two decades have been great enough to call into question the original definition of the field as the study of the 'spatial variation of agriculture.' In fact, some have argued that the mid-1980s decline in geography's interest in agriculture was really the 'death' of agricultural geography to be replaced in the 1990s by a new "geography of food" (Johnston 2000). More than ever before, the new discourses on agriculture are concerned with the way in which agricultural production is situated among all levels of the 'food chain.' Hence, studies of farming in developed market economies have been inevitably linked with a wider examination of agricultural technology, food processing, product marketing and consumer demand. In addition, geographers have come to recognize the importance of a variety of political processes on the agro-food sector including the farm policy of states and the regulatory structures of international trade (Bowler 1992). This is crucial to my insistence on holistic attentiveness to agriculture in this research.

Indeed, as might be guessed from the descriptions of agricultural change offered by Bowler and Ilbery above, throughout the 1990s, the theoretical backing for most studies in 'agricultural' geography came through borrowed concepts from political economy, which allowed farming to be viewed as part of this web or chain of complex relationships. The prevailing research topics switched to political economy interpretations of agricultural restructuring and farm-environment relationships. The new political economy approach also

favoured examinations of the social relations of agri-food systems and this research has overlapped considerably with politicized, particularly Marxist, rural social geography (Ilbery 1998). The notion of a critical rural studies, – an attempt to overturn accepted structures, institutions, and perceptions – which came out of Marxist rural geography, was seen as particularly significant to the study of agricultural change. Yet, if critical analysis of agricultural change did emerge from an early 1990s attempt to re-insert the dimension of ‘class’ into rural analysis, the fallout has been hybrid. Not only did the critical approach bring a variety of competing schools of thought on class relations within agricultural productivism and conventional industrial agriculture (which Bowler and Ilbery highlight in their research) but it also brought about new theories on social relations within systems of ‘alternative’ agriculture.

An exemplar of a *critical*, political economy approach that highlights new social theory is Lucy Jarosz’s article “Understanding agri-food networks as social relations.” Here Jarosz seeks to show not only *that* agri-food chains can operate on regional scales, which enhance the presence of the family farm, but also *how* the people within these networks interact in ways that promote sustainable agriculture. Jarosz applies theories that claim relationships based upon trust and cooperation are crucial to the life and liveliness of alternative food networks. This kind of research implies that in working towards place-attentiveness through dialogue on agriculture, as I do in South Jersey, we might want to pay close attention to issues of trust and cooperation between divergent actors and groups. Moreover, it may be important to South Jersey community dialogue that concepts coming from the political economy tradition have allowed (or forced) geographers to deal with analysis on multiple scales. If the new era of agriculture is indeed a ‘post-productivist’ transition in which two divergent emphases of farming co-exist, then researchers need to discuss such multi-scaled interactions as those between large corporate and small family farms and those between global and local firms (Johnston 2000). Only in this way can agricultural geographers integrate a broader appreciation of the complex processes and power structures that have an effect on today’s small farms. Both large and small, local and global

are germane to a search for wholeness in agriculture on the local level. And, certainly, as farmer and author Wendell Berry makes clear in his recent *Citizenship Papers*, the imagining of any meaningful attentiveness to local people, land, and community (any local sustainability), must begin with the imagining of a globalism (or global perspective) that adjusts to and allows for diverse local systems. Understanding such theoretical concerns can be crucial to our search for tools within the field that have practical application in helping to establish, define, and refine ‘sustainable’ local ways of life. Yet, the question of specifics remains; in what precise ways can we use these theories?

In order to answer this question more fully, I propose to examine how agricultural geography, privileging the political economy perspective, approached the subject of farm size. Here I seek to provide one concrete example of a topic and trajectory for agriculture-based eco-social dialogue that could take place in a community setting such as Burlington County, New Jersey. It seems that one way to look at the holistic eco-social significance of agriculture is to examine the economic and social trends that seem to be linked to the very size of farming businesses themselves. To reiterate an earlier point, I use this example only to illustrate a possible trajectory for theorizing, and not to grant its certain validity. The truth or falsity of the importance of farm size to the civic issues of stewardship and sustainability becomes, then, a matter to be negotiated in dialogue.

Ian Bowler addresses the subject of farm size in a chapter in his own book, entitled “The agricultural significance of farm size and land tenure.” Bowler exposes the connections between farm size and attentiveness to land or place by pointing to a number of trends, which seem to show that residents of rural areas whose agricultural land is dominated by large-agribusiness (corporate farms) have an inferior ‘quality of life’ to those that live within rural areas characterized by a family-farm economic structure. This trend is commonly referred to as the ‘Goldschmidt Hypothesis’ (see Netting 1993, 333). In *Derelict Landscapes: the wasting of America’s built environment*, geographer John Jakle mentions similar concerns of rural decline that are linked to the ‘bigness’ of industrial agriculture and corporate dominance within the agro-food chain. Quality of life, along with quality of land and quality of landscape

deteriorates when family sized farms are replaced by large corporate agricultural landholdings (Jakle 1992).

What is meant by 'quality of life' here is key to the idea of attentiveness to place. Bowler determines quality of life in relation to frequency of participation in social and religious institutions and local residents' political involvement. Similarly, Jakle defines 'quality of life' in regard to evidence he finds of community cohesion, cooperation, and loyalty to various local institutions. In effect, in saying that big agri-business equates with a loss of 'quality of life' both Bowler and Jakle are arguing that larger (the more corporate, less human-scaled) agricultural landholdings seem to have an adverse effect on the active citizenship of local residents – and thus on any committed attentiveness to 'place.' Whether or not this is true in all cases, Bowler and Jakle illustrate here an important hypothesis to be critically interrogated, in dialogue, in the local context of South Jersey. By undertaking such questioning in South Jersey I hope to urge the use of agricultural hypothesizing as a gateway to begin a communal evaluation of the area's general social and ecological trends.

Beyond farm size, there are a number of other subjects that were taken up by agricultural geographers following a political economy approach during the 1990s, which seem relevant to any dialogue about the holism of agriculture. For example, a new focus on the topic of food marketing in the 1990s added to the holism of geographic inquiry into agriculture by offering concrete ways to consider the interconnectedness of farmers with the rest of the food chain. Indeed, the emphasis on the growing power of the 'down stream' end of the food chain seems highly relevant to our search for tools of a 'sustainable' geography of agriculture. In the post-productivist era, agricultural geographers have become aware that farmers themselves are no longer oriented simply towards production. They too have begun to look outside their 'farm gates' and are increasingly involved and interested in the marketing of their produce. They see that their struggle in the post-productivist era is not to yield larger and larger harvest, but to find a way to portray their product as uniquely desirable – fresher, healthier, more gourmet. As a result of this new interest in marketing, numerous 'alternative' marketing strategies have opened up to family farmers ('alternative' to dominant

methods where it can be argued that more power is given to large corporate retailers and food-processing industries). They have done so by means of marketing cooperatives, which “aim to increase the returns of their members from sales of produce or provide them with greater competitive security” as well as by means of direct marketing (including pick-your-own) enterprises (Hart 1992, 187).

These kinds of linkages within the agro-food sector are important both for the discussion of produce flows and for appreciating flows of power and knowledge within the food chain. Clearly, marketing can have a spatial effect on food systems, as choices made in marketing often determine where, and specifically how far from the fields, a farmer’s produce will be sold. In addition, by controlling consumer demand of products, and thus placing certain controls and constraints on farmers, choices in marketing can manipulate the condition and development of land and landscape. From a farm owner’s perspective, then, know-how in marketing gives one the power to act in either place ‘attentive’ or place ‘alienating’ ways. This is precisely why geographer Jonathan Hart points to geography’s need to be conscious of changing marketing systems, which he implicates as one of the factors effecting broader issues of land and landscape. He reveals that marketing may ultimately affect both the ecological integrity of the countryside and the readiness with which consumers will maintain an appreciation for local agriculture. Such newfound importance in the non-farm aspects of agriculture may be particularly important for a dialogue on agriculture in rural-urban mixed areas like Burlington County precisely because it encourages non-rural residents to recognize their connectedness with agriculture. Particularly, reflection on such issues may help to encourage a new understanding of food purchasing and consumption as ‘agricultural acts.’

Indeed, the 1990s political economy geography of agriculture encouraged an important transformation towards holism in the geographic inquiry of farm and farmer. Theories from political economy simultaneously gave a ‘dying’ agricultural geography new life and broadened the scope of agricultural analysis so widely that it began to blend with both rural geography and an interdisciplinary field of agro-food analysis (Johnston 2000).

Yet, perhaps because of this blending, geographers have begun to recognize important omissions inherent to the political economy approach. Consequently, the shift to new decade, new century, new millennium, has again brought about significant new changes within agricultural geography – specifically a shift to a more cultural perspective. We see that these changes begin on the periphery – in rural geography and a consumer-oriented geography of food – but they have also made their way into specifically farming-centered geographic work. Of course, we also see that many political-economy subjects of interest (such as food marketing) continue to be central areas of concern during this cultural shift. The following section addresses these changes in full and examines the agricultural geography of the 2000s for pragmatic ways to speak to the wholeness of agriculture.

Beyond the modern era

Post-modern influences

Post-modernist philosophies have been influencing ‘human’ geography, the rest of the social sciences, and particularly cultural studies for more than a few years. However, the movement away from class analysis and structural points of view did not surface within rural studies until the 1990s. Chris Philo (1992) and Murdock and Pratt (1993) were some of the first to emphasize the relevance of post-modernism to rural geography, using these new philosophies to critique what they saw as a flawed empiricist-influenced, perhaps logical-positivist approach to rural issues. Chris Philo found fault with Marxist, political economy, and ‘modernist’ perspectives in general for being “peopleless” and further argued for the need to let the marginalized – women, gays, minorities – show in rural geographic work (Ilbery 1998, 42). Other geographers followed, making explicit issues of ambiguous social identities and values, and addressing a variety of new kinds of discourses – the popular, professional, and private along with the academic. New stress was placed on emotional attachments to place, cultural analysis of landscapes, and socially constructed meanings of community.

Without a doubt, post-modernism made a strong impression on rural geography during the 1990s, influencing changes to both methodology and epistemology. Accordingly, rural geographers through the 1990s have increasingly dismissed the modernist belief of the 'true knowledge' of the 'detached observer' and replaced this with a theory of 'situated' knowledge. In general, there has been more reflection on how rural geographers as researchers connect with those that they study. This idea of 'situated' knowledge (knowledge that is meaningful because of its *position* in context) also leads to conceptions of social identity as fluid and multi-dimensional, as socially and culturally constructed and always in transition or negotiation. We see geographers begin to examine the complex processes of such identity formation in rural areas as a way to provide new insights into contemporary changes in the countryside (Phillips 1998). However, through the 1990s these ideas largely remained within geographic discourses on rural *social life* and particularly on problematizing gender and race within these discourses. The farmer and the farm as elements of rural life remained, for the most part, strangely absent (or at least in the distant background) in rural post-modern geographic work through the 1990s (Morris 2003).

Indeed, it seems that within specifically *agricultural* geography, which was stimulated by political economy perspectives much more than was *rural* geography, researchers recoiled from most post-modern and post-structuralist ideas until very recent. While a faltering rural geography received a much-needed boost from the 'fresh' cultural theories within post-modernist discourses, agricultural geography had already been granted its boost from theories in political economy and hence took longer to make a 'cultural turn.' In fact, of late, this 'cultural turn' is still progressing and agricultural geography today is beginning to experience some of the methodological and epistemological changes that were highlighted for rural geography above. Carol Morris and Nick Evans analyze this shift in their paper "Agricultural Turns, Geographical Turns: retrospect and prospect" (2003).

Morris and Evans point out that although the cultural turn in agricultural geography is indeed arguably derived from post-modernism/post-structuralism, we do not need to explain today's work as explicitly post-modern geography. Like the cultural turn in rural geography,

the turn within agricultural geography surfaced in light of frustration with the domination of the political economy perspective and its hold on the development of (farm-relevant) theory. And, as in rural geography, much new work in agricultural geography seems to be characterized by a post-modern/post-structural epistemology -- what has been described as a “heightened reflexivity toward the role of language, meaning, and representations in the constitution of reality and knowledge of reality” (Barnett 1998, 380). However, we should also note that more humanistic approaches, and particularly the previously discussed 1970s behavioral approach to agriculture, deserve recognition for “paving the way for the cultural turn of more recent vintage” (Philo in Morris 2003, 5). Focusing on the ‘culture’ in agriculture is not an exclusively new trend, just as investigation into human perceptions, emotions, meanings, values and interpretations is not exclusively post-modern. The ‘newness’ and ‘novelty’ of the recent ‘cultural turn’ in agricultural geography might be more aptly described as a re-assessing of never-absent cultural concerns through new theoretical lenses and with new methodological tools. Yet, the ‘newness’ of the ‘cultural turn’ is real in as much as it sits within a paradigm of heightened post-modern/post-structuralist awareness and presents agricultural geography with trajectories for research that did not and could not have emerged until now.

Modern Agri-Cultural Geography

Thus, we turn to examine the new threads that contemporary agricultural geographers have begun to follow. However, not surprisingly, when we begin to try to unearth exactly what constitutes this new phase in agricultural geography – this still emerging ‘political-economy-gone-cultural’ geographic discourse on the farm – we run into a series of confusions. First, the above description has gone to some lengths to make a distinction between rural and agricultural geographic inquiry. Yet, we have not yet touched on the interdisciplinary field of agro-food analysis, which too has been affected in notable ways by the post-modern academic world. In the 1990s we saw agricultural geography broaden its horizons to connect itself with all aspects of the food-chain, from production to consumption.

Along these lines, the trends of agro-food analysis are just as important to our discussion. In fact, they may be *more* important to the culturally informed agricultural geography in as much as the loosely post-modern bending toward culture that has crept through the academic world at large can be seen as a bending towards ‘consumption’ – or ‘consumption studies’ – as well. In other words, agricultural geography as a field inherently focused on matters of production becomes ever-more linked with the other end of the food-chain when ‘consumption’ is suddenly taken as a ‘hot’ area of social contestation and cultural identity formation (Morris 2003). Recently, a number of academics have indeed begun to claim that, in opposition to the Marxist view of individuals finding meaning through their productive capacities, people are now defining themselves through consumption (Dixon 1999).

For simplicity, then, we can identify agricultural geographic work as geographic inquiry in which the central *concern* is the farm, though the points of entry to this work may at first seem a good distance from the production side of food systems. In fact, we may see that (as was also true in the political economy approach) numerous cultural approaches to solving contemporary agricultural dilemmas begin far from the soil in which the seed is sown. In addition, the methodologies of this era’s culturally-informed agricultural geography have stretched out considerable distances. For example, qualitative approaches like ethnography and interview based consumer research are being used with increasing frequency. In addition, discourse analysis and semiotic strategies have been employed to provide Cultural Studies type investigations of the meanings of food and farmland. Appropriately, these new methods have encouraged the acknowledged range of possible data sources to expand. Certainly, this is a great shift from the days when quantitative approaches were paramount and agricultural geography seemed to lock arms with economic geography. However, we should remember that the bringing in of ‘new’ methods (or ‘renewed’) does not mean an erasure or forgetting of the old. Though at times such definitive ‘shifts’ in a field seem durable and permanent, and new theories and methods appear right on the mark, we must consider them in the context of a continually negotiated discipline.

That said, I would like to stress that at this moment, there are definitive signs of a cultural turn in agricultural geography that is not only robust but also demonstrates great, perhaps exceptional, potential for helping us understand the ecological and social potentials of a holistic appreciation of agriculture. The indication of this potential may be found in the research trends of agricultural geography over the last three years as well as in the just-emerging areas of inquiry that have been identified by numerous agricultural geographers. We will first turn to explore a few interrelated areas of work that have recently held widespread interest in the field, looking for ways in which geographers have concerned themselves simultaneously and necessarily with culture and agriculture. Afterwards, we will address some budding areas of study, examining them as to their promise for speaking to the wholeness of agriculture.

Current Spheres of Activity

In “Agricultural Turns, Geographical Turns,” Morris and Evans highlight one area in which there is currently much research interest as being the analysis of ‘representations of the farm.’ The kind of research being accomplished in this area is common to the field of Cultural Studies (specifically media studies) and often involves ‘reading’ a variety of images and depictions of the farm as ‘cultural texts’ – analyzing the content to reveal ideas about the meanings and values placed on agriculture. It might also involve analysis of how television and media representations of farm life are understood, accepted, or opposed by an audience. The idea is that by analyzing the portrayal of farming as, for instance, an alternative lifestyle, or as conflictual, or as inherently non-urban, researchers problematize these definitions, point out how they have been socially constructed, and perhaps provide new ways of seeing the farm that, for our purposes, might help to clarify current issues of ecological and social concern. Indeed, in writing on this type of research Morris and Evans agree that it has the potential to show the general public how agriculture is ‘encoded’ (in cultural texts) as an activity that is, for example,

. . . worthwhile to society but that can only be conducted by those with special sets of accumulated knowledge (farmers) in a trade-off between personal fulfillment and

sacrifice, sometimes even hardship, whilst displaying sensitivity to wider societal wishes such as the respect of nature, especially animals (Morris 2003, 6).

Put simply, studying how people come to various perceptions of the farm makes us aware of how to change those perceptions that we see as harmful to our social and ecological aims and enhance those that may be helpful. Furthermore, it allows researchers to point out contradictions inherent in the various depictions of agriculture provided by popular culture, the television, and the media and thus, in theory, leads people to 'read' depictions in the same way, enabling a better understanding of the wholeness of agriculture -- its relevance or centrality to the lives of all individuals.

Yet, media and television representations of agriculture are not the only kinds of representations being studied by agricultural geographers today. There has also been an increase in analysis of 'discourse' on agriculture in general. That is, on the general discursive structure – including ideologies, symbols, narratives, models of thought – in which agriculture is given meaning. As rural geographer K. Halfacree explains, discourse analysis begins with the idea that cognitive structures, those by which we make sense of our everyday worlds, "can be seen to underlie a variety of 'discourses' or circulations of meaning including those of academics and those of the people they study" (Halfacree in Phillips 1998, 138). Again, this involves the use of 'textual' sources, often interview transcripts, printed media and advertising, and policy documents relating to the farm (Morris 2003).

An early example of this kind of research comes from geographer Julie Guthman who writes on "Regulating Meaning, Appropriating Nature: The codification of California organic agriculture" (1998). Guthman addresses the meaning of the term 'organic' by examining its socio-political construction, particularly paying attention to texts on organic regulation, and argues that its use by regulatory institutions has allowed large agribusinesses to enter into so-called 'organic' production, despite the questioned sustainability of their growing and marketing practices. She thus calls into question previously valid associations of the term 'organic' with a type of farming done 'in nature's image' whereby the environmentally harmful practices of conventional industrial agriculture are replaced by low-input, cyclical systems of cultivation. This trend is indeed important to watch as "the

refashioning [of] the organic sector into yet another resource dependent industry” has much bearing on the modern-day endorsement of ‘organic’ agriculture as a solution to agro-environmental problems (Guthman 1998, 136). I point to Guthman as an important example again not so much for the specifics of what it purports (although I think they too are significant) but more for what it *invites*. The emergence of work such as Guthman’s encourages a multi-level questioning of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ categories that have been associated with various kinds of agriculture and that may seem fixed to the uncritical observer. It asks people to begin to think for themselves about the values they place, for instance, on so-called “organic” food, or on ‘local’ food, or on the small-scale family farm, and shows them the possibility of a much more complete understanding of agriculture as it relates to the contemporary consumer.

In this respect, of equal importance may be the analysis of discourses on and representations of other areas of the agro-food chain. Another seemingly useful example is the work of Ian Cook, Philip Craig, and Mark Thorpe in ‘Biographies and Geographies: Consumer understandings of the origins of food.’ Here the authors encourage us to examine foods as cultural artifacts and to ‘deconstruct’ our weekly food-shopping excursions as to what they reveal and hide about the origins of the commodities (Cook et al 1998). The success of kind of exercise seems important to recall as we try to create community-wide dialogue on the wholeness of agriculture in South Jersey. Agricultural geography here gives us the tools to ask local residents to begin their own ‘deconstruction’ of their interactions with, understandings of, and feelings about both food and farmland. Another piece, “The Geography of Washington’s World Apple: Global expressions in a local landscape,” by Lucy Jarosz and Joan Qazi, examines the national and international advertisements of the Red Delicious apple industry and draws upon group interviews and participant observation as cultural ‘texts’. Here the authors discuss the social construction of ‘value’ and ‘quality’ in fresh apples and reveal how these constructions of value contrast with the reality of local practices of agricultural intensification in Washington State (Jarosz 1999).

Geographical studies on representations of both the farm and the non-farm aspects of the agro-food sector reveal *how* the meanings of concepts important to farm production are contested through various discursive practices. We see that beliefs about food quality, sustainable production, even general ideas about the ecological importance of non-big-business type farms, which may seem obvious or ‘natural,’ are, in fact, socially constructed in complex ways and with complex ramifications. Knowing this, it is the belief of many academics, especially those interested in critical analysis and cultural studies and including those in agricultural and rural geography, that we can use discursive practices as potential guides to understanding social action and social activism. Knowledge of the interworkings of ‘discourse’ may be considered a valuable resource in any social or political struggle, and is therefore important in trying to push for eco-social change.

Up until now we have focused on how representations of agriculture and food affect the perceptions and beliefs of society at large. Yet, the dual observation that ‘nature’ is a cultural construct and that agriculture is a result of humankind’s necessary bond to ‘nature,’ should place farmers in a unique position in terms of understandings of human-environment interactions. A number of rural and agricultural geographers have recognized this and today there is a growing body of research on the ways in which farmers interpret or perceive the environment. In many cases such research has uncovered contrasting understandings of nature (specifically appropriate management of farm environs) between farmers and conservationists or environmental ‘experts’ (Morris 2003, 8). Such research has also been concerned with formation of farmer and farm-community identities, which produce and uphold certain ‘knowledge-cultures.’ This again introduces the rather postmodern notion of situated knowledges, the idea that there can be varying ‘realities’ or ‘truths’ that come from the way in which an individual is positioned in the world, and each of these can be taken as legitimate and important within its context. Thus, the farmer might be seen as having important specific local knowledge or wisdom, created by his or her intensely close working relationship with the land, which can be very different from the ‘knowledge’ offered by academics within the agricultural and environmental sciences. This is a point that has been

continually made not only by the agricultural geographers currently involved in such research, but also by anthropologists, rural sociologists, and most importantly farmers, including oft cited writer/farmer Wendell Berry.

This kind of work may have practical value for helping to solve planning and regulatory conflicts between, for example, farmers and conservationists, but it must be done with caution. Many agree that 'nature' in general would benefit from an approach to land stewardship and environmental management that takes into consideration all kinds of knowledge, including so-called 'local' and 'traditional' knowledges. Local and/or traditional knowledge and know-how has recently been espoused, in contrast to a 'dangerously imperialist,' 'exploitative' and 'reductionist' modern science, as ecologically superior. Writers like Capra, Bookchin, Dobson, Poritt, Lovelock and Shiva all point to the unsustainability of modern science in one way or another. Interestingly, many of these authors have come to see ecological protection as necessarily linked to a culture or way of life that is intimately bound with the natural world, and, for this reason, they read local understandings of the environment as more immediate, more in-tune with local natural systems. These may indeed be valuable and valid suggestions, but, if they are they only suggestions drawn upon in local community planning, the Bookchin-Poritt-Shiva critique of 'Western' or modern science would have us reject science without asking why.

There is, of course, a danger in privileging situated, local knowledges – particularly in regard to the ecological meanings they create – without interrogation. Such interrogation has been accomplished within agricultural geography in a paper written by rural economist Jonathan Murdoch and geographer Judy Clark entitled, "Sustainable Knowledge." The authors agree that from within the environmental movement there is a certain ambivalence toward scientific knowledge – attacking it on the one hand and praising it on the other – which often leads to the proposal that 'local' or 'traditional' knowledges are superior. Murdoch and Clark reveal how local agriculture-based knowledge can be 'scientific,' but is more intimately tied with the particularities of the local environment. At the same time, the work shows that local agricultural knowledge is not always in accord with the ecological

integrity of the land and so needs to be investigated as it is put to practice in each particular context. Thus, we are advised to work towards a new approach to environmental knowledge in social science, which stresses recognition of a ‘hybridity’ of knowledges to be mixed, negotiated upon, and examined ‘in action’ (Murdoch 1994).

More recently, a second paper by Murdoch and a paper by geographer Leslie Duram tackle a similar idea – understanding the importance of ‘knowledge’ in action and in context on and about the farm. However, they go further here to assess not only farmers’ *environmental* perceptions but also farmers’ perceptions of political, economic, and social factors as to how they are created and how they effect the making of environmentally relevant decisions. Duram’s work, “Agents’ Perceptions of Structure: How Illinois organic farmers view political, economic, social, and ecological factors,” is unique in that it draws heavily on the analysis of interview transcripts, often allowing the words to ‘speak for themselves,’ to show how these organic farmers conceive of and engage with the rest of the agro-food system. On a pragmatic level, Duram asserts that her research clarifies some important cognized barriers to organic production that can hinder environmentally-sound decision making (in this particular context), which can then be addressed by community cooperation and local or regional policy change. There seems to be potential, then, for research like Duram’s to be considered as a prototype for how academics and farmers can work together in addressing both environmental and social concerns (Duram 2000)^e.

Murdoch’s paper, “Organic vs. Conventional Agriculture: knowledge, power and innovation in the food chain,” written with Kevin Morgan, offers some insights similar to Duram. Here, ‘knowledge’ is associated ever more strongly with ‘power,’ as the authors try to argue first how agricultural knowledge has been taken over by large agro-industry (chemical and food-production corporations) both downstream and upstream from production, and second, how lack of ‘knowledge’ (especially in regard to commerce and networking) can be a key problem in making the switch to organic production. In a way, the

^e Those familiar with Duram’s work may find that the report of my empirical work in Chapter Four mimics Duram’s work in an particular sense: specifically, in how I analyze in-depth interviews in ways that try to draw out the complexities of the speakers own words.

authors' approach here might be considered "evolutionary political economy" in that it looks at the evolution of processes of innovation within the food system, focusing on ideas of rational knowledge to see how economic behavior is guided and constrained (Murdoch 2000, 160). However, they acknowledge the social codification of knowledge (which gives it power) and they also privilege notions of local, tacit (unspoken) knowledge, the displacement of which, they argue, *can* lead to environmentally unsound practices. As such, their work certainly concerns 'culture,' in the broadest sense of the term and is comparable to that of critically-inclined Cultural Studies in the sense that it critiques structures of 'knowing' for a particular social agenda – namely to help increase the number of environmentally committed farmers by helping them to 're-localize' their understandings of agricultural production (Murdoch 2000). Thus, Murdoch would seem to help the argument that such 're-localization' is to be done not because we are to valorize the local for its own sake but because examining agriculture in these ways can help people to 'think' themselves to a broader understanding of our modern-day agricultural reality. Once more, then, such work demonstrates the kinds of critical, socially-relevant dialogue that can be had on the topic of agriculture and reveals more paths towards the notion of wholeness.

For one final example, I would like to return to the work of Lucy Jarosz, previously mentioned in the discussion of the political economy perspective. Here again we see this mixing of loosely postmodern cultural influences and political economy theories. Jarosz's work, "Understanding agri-food networks as social relations," engages a particular theory called Actor Network Theory, which has been identified by Morris and Evans (2003) as a distinct, albeit nascent, strand within the 'new' culturally-informed agricultural geography. Actor Network Theory comes from the observation mentioned above that in particular contexts some knowledges are given more legitimacy than others. The theory seeks to facilitate a more balanced treatment of the various agricultural knowledges that exist. Jarosz takes a detailed case-study approach in which the research process itself is meant to help farmers actually define their own 'positionality' in agro-food networks and, in the process of

describing and mapping the relations of their farming practices, actually increase their own embeddedness in regional communities. In this way, Jarosz's work seeks to identify and describe cultural and social trends and ways-of-knowing and, by the very process of doing so, seeks to act upon the real world (in this case, by hopefully enhancing the vitality of sustainable food production) (Jarosz 2000).

The above examples of research within contemporary, culturally-informed agricultural geography are, of course, only a sampling. We have seen that some of the ideas and methods of this new research can be traced back both to earlier attacks on the spatial tradition and to post-modern critiques of science. As such, they mark a turn towards a nature-society orientation that includes a strong social constructivist argument for knowledge claims and in which researchers may choose to draw on ideas or tools from anthropology, cultural studies, semiology and deconstructionism (to name a few). Yet, the 'cultural turn' is not to be labeled 'post-modern' (at least in any radical sense). In fact, the above examples demonstrate, above all, a desire to bridge social scientific ideas of objectivity with the post-modern insistence on 'situated,' local knowledges. Along these lines, they may be taken as forward-thinking work within agricultural geography towards, as feminist scholar Donna Haraway puts it, "a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate reconstruction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing" (Haraway 1996, 121). Here, with this new work, we are urged to highlight situatedness, partiality, and local particularity over universality in the world of the small family farm, not simply because it happens to be the postmodern way, but for the sake of the pragmatism and for the unexpected openings and new connections that come along with the recognition of varied ways-of-knowing.

This brief review of the so-called 'cultural shift' sheds light on particular trajectories within the field of agricultural geography, which demonstrate both tools and concepts that may be important in action as South Jersey residents begin to discuss and negotiate the wholeness or holistic nature of agriculture. This is true in two ways, as I have explained that

my research is an attempt to not only understand the situation of South Jersey in 'local' terms but also to create, essentially, a "new social reality through discourse" that encourages continued learning (Forester 1999, 126). In this way, we begin to see the potential for social and ecological benefits (sustainability, stewardship) to emerge from the creation of a learning culture, which uses agriculture as a framework for general social and ecological questioning. Yet there remain some budding areas of inquiry, not often included in any but the most recent accounts of the geography/farming interface, that seem to bring us even closer to the kind of agricultural geography I see as valuable to the South Jersey 'visioning' process.

Budding realms of agricultural inquiry

Localism and self identity through farm and food

Indeed a few budding areas of inquiry seem to hold special promise for speaking to the ecological and social benefits of appreciating agriculture as holistic concept. Such areas may include threads found within current geographic work on agriculture, as well as ideas and concepts from other fields that have not yet been related in any direct way with farming research. Hence, the approaches to be discussed here are varied. However, many of them (albeit in multifaceted ways) seem to converge on the idea of 'localism.' This localism is not one that accentuates provinciality and immobility, but rather recognizes regional and global connections and makes room for negotiation and change. This is a 'new' localism, one that grows out of the previously described insistence on particularities and situated knowledge, and one that is inherently attentive to 'land' as well as to the meanings and identities that result from such attentiveness. Agriculture is, of course, central to this localism, and this leads to a re-evaluation of farmers as key figures in cultivating 'place' awareness (ecological and social) and farms as places of cultural identity and political/civic obligation.

Of course, this 'new' localism must not be valorized without examining its 'performance' in each given locality. Above I speak of a particular vision of 'localism' as an ideal. Geographer Michael Winter in "Embeddedness, the New Food Economy, and

Defensive Localism,” recognizes a politics of localism in which consumers not only come to equate locally-grown food with ‘quality,’ but also find local food purchasing meaningful in terms of their own sense of community belonging. Yet we must also acknowledge that such ‘identity politics,’ which circulate around visions of the local, do not, of necessity, equate with renewed attentiveness to land and local ecological integrity. Although recent trends toward local food purchasing have been applauded by advocates of sustainable agriculture, Winter’s research points out that we may be too quick to associate localism with ecologism and local food with environmentally-sound practices (Winter 2003). While local food purchasing is ideal in terms of the compaction of food systems and energy dependence, Winter reveals that we need to examine more in trying to come up with a notion of localism that includes communal ecological attentiveness as well as social attentiveness in a way that will enable the long-term viability of commitment to ‘place’.

I am not the first to discuss rather visionary projections for ‘localism.’ In fact, there is arguably such a vision behind much of today’s authorship on dissatisfaction with the loss of the ‘local’ and the search for ‘real life’ in ‘real’ attachment to ‘place.’ We must engage with this writing carefully and critically, fully knowing that any ‘solution’ we find in an agro-ecological vision of localism will not only be a ‘situated’ truth, but moreover will require ‘situation’ and constant re-negotiation in order to gain meaning and legitimacy. Furthermore, one area of this vision may require particularly careful consideration; that is, how such ‘localism’ is to engage with the current notions of economic development of the capitalist market economy. We have already come across some of the tensions that surface when ‘alternative’ systems of agriculture meet conventional systems and when ecological principles are held up against economic ones. The reality of these tensions is negotiated in the social maneuverings from which emerge group and personal identities and attachment or non-attachment to place.

Johnathan Bascom, in “‘Energizing’ Rural Space: The representation of countryside culture as an economic development strategy,” addresses this issue, linking us back to the idea of social construction of rural space but with an eye to economic concerns. Although a

number of 'alternative' agriculturists view the current capitalist market system as inherently anti-ecological, the reality is that many farmers need to engage with this system in local, regional, and even global ways in order to survive financially. Recognizing this, farmers have begun to use society's nostalgia for 'real life' through attachment to 'place' as a marketing strategy – indeed, a quite post-productivist idea. Bascom's article looks at the idea of 'energizing' rural spaces, including farms, for the purposes of consumption. He finds, not surprisingly, that rural places hold special attraction in today's fast-paced, highly mobile world and that we may be able to engage with people's perceptions of cultural authenticity (and the rural/pastoral) to attract 'consumption' (both of local food and of 'goods' and services offered by diversified farm enterprises) (Bascom 2001). Of course, this idea is not so much geared toward producing an 'authentic' agro-ecological localism in any particular community but towards using the desire for 'localism' to the economic advantage of farmers.

However, given the wealth of research done on the current diversification strategies of family farmers from within the political economy perspective, it serves us to ask whether these two aims might be met. In other words, we should consider the possibility that we may be able to use current cultural longings for rurality, localism, and the small scale agriculturist to boost, simultaneously, the viability of family farms and a communal attentiveness to the local particularities of the agro-environment. This very idea has been explored in much of the literature of Community Economic Development and it is indeed presented as an issue to be negotiated in the 'local' context – with the local residents on whose lives such 'planning' will come to bear. In South Jersey, a public "planning through learning" must certainly contend with the dual issues of agricultural viability and communal attachment to 'place'.

Models for localism and place attachment

This strategic use of the idea of localism could take a number of forms. Current research on two subject areas – leisure/tourism geography and food cultures – offer some leads. Within tourism studies, the idea of agro-tourism is growing as a potential income diversification strategy for family farmers. This is at least partly a result of the recognition

that people seek out group and personal identities attached to place, and that they often perceive rural farming communities as localities where one can witness such ‘authentic’ place-attached identities. In papers like Roberta MacDonald and Lee Jolliffe’s “Cultural Rural Tourism: Evidence from Canada,” we see a focus on the consumer attempt to fulfill ones desire for place-attachment through the touristic experience. However, MacDonald and Jolliffe also highlight evidence that the best way to create such tourist spaces is through the creation of community-based partnerships. Thus the community-based partnerships of rural localities become ‘self-fulfilling prophecies’ in that they enter into a dialectical relationship with tourism whereby the very act of cooperation in creating tourist spaces for the viewing of place-based rural culture actually leads to a strengthening of a particular place-attached community identity. MacDonald and Jolliffe do not highlight the family farm *per se* in this discussion, but certainly include family farming in their evaluation of this tourism-based strategy for rural income (MacDonald 2003).

Geographers Karen De Bres and James Davis bring more clarity to this kind of strategy in “Celebrating Group and Place Identity: A case study of a new regional festival.” They examine the role of rural festivals (a number with environmental and agricultural components) as spaces for both tourists seeking a place-based experience and ‘locals’ seeking to develop their sense of local identity. The authors note that the festivals’ said goal of “promoting a sense of community” is problematic, bringing up all sorts of reservations about ‘authenticity’ within commodified spaces and implications associated with ideas of natural and cultural ‘preservation’ (De Bres 2001, 327). However, in the instance of their Kansas River case study, a rural area with a relatively poor self-image, the authors conclude that “despite being characterized as an example of tourist commodification, such [festival] events did lead to a positive self-identification for the local community” (De Bres 2001, 326). This realization suggests that at least in some contexts agri-tourism, including promotional farm festivals, may be useful in helping to celebrate agriculture in a way that culturally legitimates the need for attentiveness to land and place.

On the other side of the agri-food chain, papers such as Eric Ball's "Greek Food after Mousaka: Cookbooks, 'local' culture and the Cretan diet," and Wes Flack's "American Microbreweries and Neolocalism: 'Ale-ing' for a sense of place," point us to the importance of food in the construction of cultural identity. We see cookbooks, restaurants, and various practices of eating become ways to encourage not only consumption of local (particularly 'organic') food but also personal and group identification with a real community that values attentiveness to the 'whole' of a place, including its ecological particularities (Flack 1997, Ball 2003). In this way, food practices could begin to be seen as 'rituals' – one of the multifaceted means by which we can try to create and uphold a holistic understanding of agriculture and use it as a cultural framework for discussing our future ecological and social well-being^f.

A few geographers take the idea of the human experience of 'place' and desire for place attachment one step further. There has been a small but growing concern with a more spiritual view of the earth and the idea of 'sacred' places. This may be important to pay attention to in discussions of the family farm since the farmer's connection to the land has often been described as a quasi-mystical bond. Also, the pragmatic linkages between spirituality, ecology and agriculture have been drawn out in recent academic dialogues such as those that took place during the 1999 conference *The Good in Nature and Humanity*, sponsored by the Harvard Forum on Religion and Ecology in which farmer Wendell Berry was the key note speaker and many other farmers took part. Yet notions of 'sacred' and 'spiritual' are difficult to define and thus challenging to discuss. A few geographers have recently attempted a geographic approach to spirituality^g but, unlike some recent ecological and anthropological discussions of spirituality, none in geography have focused on agriculture in any detail. Thus, we can recognize the topic of spiritual connectedness with

^f We will see later that as a result of this suggestion about food practices as holistic agricultural 'rituals,' the January 8, Community Forum includes a shared meal and other 'intentional' ritual forms.

^g One laudable attempt at a geographic approach to 'spirituality' is Paul Chamberlain's 2001 article, "Topomystica: Investigation into the concept of mystic place." A second example is offered by Richard Tresidder from within tourism geography, "Tourism and Sacred Landscapes."

landscape, ecology, and farm as a potentially valuable door that largely remains to be opened within the realm of agricultural geography.

An eco-social reality of 'care'?

We have looked at the notion of 'localism' and have considered some models for place attachment. However, in terms of budding realms of agricultural geography, one new theoretical approach seems incredibly salient to my concern regarding the disconnect between people and land in South Jersey; this new approach gives us an innovative (yet hopefully not entirely unfamiliar) way to think about the idea of creating a communally upheld localism that is dedicated to the care of people, land and community. The approach is called "Care Theory" and it represents an alternative positioning within agricultural geography (not yet founded) that may have the potential to give rise to a radically new attitude toward nature, land, and 'place'. Care Theory is a school of ethics, grown out of feminist thought, that demonstrates a rather 'systems-thinking' orientation in that its promise for the linkages between agriculture and community rests in its central tenet: the *interdependence* of humans with both each other and all living things.

In "Care Theory and 'Caring' Systems of Agriculture," Janel Curry describes the ideas of Care Theory and how they can further geography's understanding of the moral choices involved in agricultural systems. She argues against the way that we understand actors (farmers and others within agri-food networks) as free individuals, each pursuing his or her own interest and appraising public institutions according to how well they assist in one's own advancement. This inhibits our ability to conceive of the rights and needs of nature and community, actually placing such ideas outside of the realm of 'human nature.' Instead she proposes a new theory of human nature, one in which care and attentiveness to 'others' is central and which allows for the dissolution of the boundary between morality and politics that she argues has been created by Western concepts of personhood. In other words, Curry argues that in place of a political structure that assumes independence and autonomy as the central tenets of human life, it is possible to envision a greater inclusion of 'care-giving and

receiving' in the political realm (Curry 2001). Curry seems to focus on the 'local' as a site for this 'care-giving and receiving' simply because, in her view, the 'local' is the scale at which human care and affection can be understood.

Along these lines, the ideas of Care Theory bring us back to the notion of situated agricultural knowledges, and the postmodern insistence on offering legitimacy to local knowledge – knowledge in and of 'contexts' – in research. Here, again, we see the particular, the partial, the contextual, being emphasized (usually *over* the 'universal' (Western scientific) knowledge, although this need not be the case). Undeniably, Care Theory has a processal and negotiable impression of truth, looking at 'theory' not as dogma, but as "a story or narrative operating as an open system of ideas that can be retold and reformulated" (Curry 2001, 123). In a seemingly important way then, Care Theory is related to ideas of pragmatism in that knowledge is considered most important for the action it may produce and its quest entails a continual (communal) process.

In light of this, Janel Curry conceptualizes 'caring' local knowledge as "commitment-centered" knowledge – alternative understandings that are based on attentiveness to the local and that are embedded in relationships. Thus the formation of 'local' knowledge is inextricably intertwined with ideas of substantive citizenship and active civic participation. As Curry writes, "living within limits in the context of commitment to place, people, and nature actually enhances community life and caring . . . and in turn informs the practice of democratic citizenship" (Curry 2001, 124). Indeed, in a theory of 'caring' agriculture, the farmer is highly attentive to agriculture's linkages (and potential linkages) with local cultural politics.

With this in mind, let me briefly consider one possible trajectory for local agriculture-based dialogue. If we are from here to talk about challenges to the so-called "industrial" mindset (or the general tendency to abstract what could be uniquenesses of 'place'), what may be most important about Curry's theory of 'caring agriculture' is that the small-scaled relational nature of humans and an emphasis on understanding 'others' (other people, other animals, other plant or soil communities) leads to systems that are "context-

bound and not translocatable” (Jackson in Curry 2001, 125). In other words, it could be argued that with such an outlook the so-called “industrial” tendencies towards abstraction – seeing the world as a series of interchangeable parts – becomes agri-culturally impossible. All parts of the world – the land, animals, plants, people, and built environment – become important in the specificities or uniquenesses they maintain within relationships.

Referencing Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson in sequence Curry writes of an agriculture in which the farmer engages in a ‘conversation’ with the world around her. This conversation,

. . . would proceed directly to serious thought about our condition and our predicament – the living out of our moral life together rather than imposition of abstract universal principles . . . and would make known the fact that in such an agriculture, “the relationship is the means and ends, requiring a life of attentiveness and responsiveness to the other” (Curry 2001, 125).

Of course this attentiveness to our local surroundings should not mean that we are disengaged with the world beyond. Janel Curry along with numerous other authors (Prakash 1995, Hannum 1995, and Berry 1991, for example) admit that because humans think and live on smaller, ‘human’ scales, *care* is somewhat limited in proximity. Yet, within a caring epistemology that recognizes the interdependence of all things, a mentality of systems-thinking is encouraged such that the local is inevitably tied to the regional, the global, and indeed, perhaps, the universal. Along these lines, Care Theory, when combined with the wholeness of agriculture, could be seen as a potential model for localism in globally-connected regions defined by small-scale farming like Southern New Jersey. Indeed, we finally arrive at an argument that directly speaks to the ecological and social potentials of agriculture as a holistic cultural concept; civic attentiveness to ‘care’ within food systems, coupled with an enhanced *learning* culture, would seem to encourage communal attentiveness to general issues of sustainability and to the care of the people-land-community union. Yet this argument would still need verification from communities on a local level in order to find its real-world ‘substance.’

Conclusions

In ending here, with our attention focused on ideas of community and communal attentiveness to food systems, I hope to draw us back to some of the earlier examples of geographic inquiry into agriculture. The new localism that has been postulated here is one that must be encouraged sensitively. The idea of building ecologically-attentive communities (whether rural, suburban, or urban) that recognize the centrality of agriculture to human life, is not a standard to be enforced from 'above.' Sustainability in and through agriculture, as well as the general idea of cultural re-connection to the land, at any given moment must be based upon what is in the realm of *possible* – ecologically, economically, socially, and spiritually. We must, for example, pay heed to the effects of strong economic forces, as well as strong cultural forces, on agriculture, which so many geographers have found fundamental to explaining farming and food systems. Without an eye toward economic viability and the nature of farming as an occupation, we begin to lose hope for the practical application of our research and can get too caught up in nostalgic visions of rural life.

Of course, we might also remember that much of the economically-central research on agriculture took place at a time when agriculture played a much greater role in the world's economy and when agricultural geography was clearly defined as the study of the spatial variation of agriculture. Here, quantitative methods, categorization, organizational models, and classification schemes were paramount. How relevant are these ideas to today's agricultural geography? Has agricultural geography shifted to culturally-informed analysis of whole food systems, never to look back? The obvious answer is no. First, 'quantitative' methods and categorization in general have enormous value of synthesis and persuasion, particularly in planning. We need not argue for their dissolution into the academic background, but rather for their selective incorporation into a whole new ('culturally-informed' and 'contextually-relevant') approach to problem solving within agricultural geography. Indeed, through the history of agricultural geography we have seen inspiring work done on spatial modeling, shifting markets, and seasonality (for example), which can be seen as highly relevant not only to macro-conceptual ideas about sustainability, but also to

ideas of 'seasonal eating' and the effects of regional food availability on cultural identity. More recently, theories from political economy have clarified the relevance of the state, of political choice, and of policy-making to the existence and viability of agriculture as an occupation and way of life. From this kind of research, upon which we will continually need to call, agricultural geography has gleaned a recognition of the small scale farmer's current need to 'diversify,' as well as an understanding of the relevance of the whole food chain, from the size, type, and structure of the farm, to the size, type, and structure of the market.

Indeed, all of the mentioned 'approaches' to the study of agriculture have something to offer geographic inquiry into farming today. Yet, by addressing the various 'approaches' in this way, we remove them from their context and thus overlook a crucial point. Perhaps in considering past research within agricultural geography we should be most alert to the approaches not for what they offer, but for what they reveal to us about *ideology* within agricultural geography. Certainly, it may be telling that we can identify a number of examples in which ideological changes in agriculture are paralleled by ideological changes in agricultural geography. For instance, the economic focus in agricultural geography related to an economistic ideology in the countryside. In addition, the world food concern in the academic world was reflected in a heightened 'real-world' emphasis on agricultural intensification. Likewise, the 1990's crisis in agriculture, perceived by both farmers and academics, was reflected in whole new ways of conceptualizing farm and farmer, and whole new ways of organizing the farm business.

Hence, one wonders whether there could be an important sort of dialectical relationship between farming trends themselves and the academic study of agriculture. If so, perhaps this cultural turn in agricultural geography (and much of the rest of social science at large) is indeed related to a greater emphasis on identity, consciousness building, cultural survival, and survival through culture in agriculture itself. Certainly, this would give new meaning to the importance of academics and farmers working together. Agricultural geographers might begin to engage in an innovative, pragmatic kind of research in which the community of surrounding 'others' is of central importance. Here, the union of people, land,

and community in all settings – rural, suburban, and urban – can be understood most fully. With this kind of holistic research agricultural geography could open our eyes to an array of ‘knowledges’ and ideas to be mixed, negotiated upon, and examined ‘in action,’ while working towards communal ways to meet the imperatives of ecological and social “sustainability” in and, most importantly, *through* agriculture today.

CHAPTER THREE: A New Space for Learning

“Dialogue is the route to self-reflection, self-knowledge and liberation from disempowering beliefs. It is also the route to mutual learning, acceptance of diversity, trust and understanding.” (Wilson 1996, 7)

Introduction

During more than a century of growth in the rich soils of the discipline of geography, the idea of a “sustainable” geography of agriculture has taken root, burgeoned, and blossomed. We see the possibility today that agricultural geographers might begin to engage in an innovative, pragmatic kind of research in which the community of surrounding ‘others’ is of central importance. In the introductory chapter of this thesis, I suggested that this pragmatic kind of research might best be described as a kind of pedagogical approach to problem solving – a form of ‘critical pedagogy’ that seeks to develop new understanding *in* agricultural geography and *for* certain farm-based geographic ‘regions’ of the world. However, after having identified its historical context and the tools that have been made available, I have yet to examine the methodology behind this new kind of agricultural geography, particularly in regard to the idea of affecting ‘real-world’ change. Are there available approaches to research that can help address a variety of real-world ecological and social issues concerning landscape destruction and ecological in-attentiveness, such as those I identify in *South Jersey under the Stars*? Is there a connection to be made here to the concrete realities of land, landscape, and development in South Jersey? Can theoretical discussions of farming and food lead us to actions that affect our lands, landscapes, and communities?

Such questions flavored my search for appropriate methods for this thesis. The fact that I began this research with the premise that the processes of our future development as communities become life-rooted and not project-oriented, has made it quite challenging to develop a suitable project-methodology. I needed methods that would allow for structure yet would be flexible to life. It is not surprising, then, that I found examples of work within the field of “Community Economic Development,” (CED) to provide a valuable start to my search. The literature of Community Economic Development, a form of ‘sustainable’ development planning that grew out of a desire to have poor or marginalized neighborhoods and groups define their own terms of development, seemed particularly relevant to this research for a number of reasons. First, Community Economic Development strategies often

refer to 'pride of place,' a concept of possibly high relevance to the civic potential of agriculture in the 'garden state' and to the objective of land stewardship. In addition, historically Community Economic Development has sought for ways to promote identification with one's community, to encourage community owned institutions, and to uphold objectives like fraternity and civic participation. Thus, its "development" strategies seek economically viable solutions, but its ultimate goals derive outside the realm of the market economy and inside, perhaps, the realm of cultural politics (Halpern 1995, 134). Indeed, the axis of work within Community Economic Development is often what researcher Patricia Wilson calls "intentional educational action," through which she says begins the process of "negotiating change in values and attitudes for a new democratic culture" (Wilson 1996, 7). Such intentional educational action centers on a group-wide (or community-wide) examination of what, how, and why people feel and think about their local setting.

I begin this chapter, then, with the idea of intentional educational action. Here I work to demonstrate a way that agricultural geographers can begin to teach communities how to think about cultural attentiveness to place and how to examine cultural connection to the land by questioning together what we know and how we feel about agriculture. This questioning is meant to lead to cultural re-assessment and social change and is, hence, the first step in a "development" of a new kind, as I have tried to initiate in South Jersey. Indeed what I have tried to create is a dialectical and action-oriented kind of agri-cultural learning that is meant to help dispel alienation from land and place. The hope is that South Jersey residents begin to plan, learn, and live together the realities of "wholeness" through agriculture.

Community Development and Transformative Learning

Re-theorizing development

I have made clear that I want to explore pedagogical ways to further the possibilities of agriculture in relation to such modernist goals as "ecological protection," "land stewardship," "community cohesion," and other 'civic' benefits. Thus I seek action as an

outcome. I want to be sure that my work within agri-cultural geography can result in tangible changes in terms of future “growth” and “development” around and among local communities. Because I desire such tangible products, I find an intriguing manner of approach to my examination of agricultural pedagogy in some of the most recent dialogue regarding the revisioning of “development” or the “development project.” Although much literature regarding “development critique” refers to the modern project to “develop” the third-world or “under-developed” nations, the theories and ideas of this critique can give us insight into how any local community might guide its progress and growth in ways that are consistent with visions for ecological and social “sustainability” – or, we might say, for a ‘caring’ ecological and social reality.

Yet we might ask: What is progress? What is growth? What does this mean for “development?” As I just implied, we might be most aware of the term “development” as it refers to the so-called modernist project of “development.” This is an important connotation to explore since “development” as a project has been criticized as inflexible, narrow minded, even imperialistic, and hence incapable of moving the world forward to a state of decreased poverty, increased social equity, and safeguarded agro-ecological integrity. Particularly important here is the fact that of late, much of the critical review of development has relied on a postmodern critique of the social and natural sciences to argue that the failure of development is a result of its adherence to Western, universalizing, hegemonic knowledge claims. A number of “development” theorists have proposed a shift in development thinking from reliance on grand meta-narratives of truth to an epistemology of tentativeness and situatedness. The labels of Western ‘knowledge’ as narrow-minded and imperialistic may be important, but what I find most helpful about this kind of critique is that it works at a grand scale – asking for fundamental kinds of re-thinking and an openness to malleable and negotiable ways of conceptualizing particular local situations. In this way, the current growing body of literature from the development critique (which in some ways can be labeled as postmodern) seems to be making room for a new kind of community ‘action’ that is

sensitive to modernist concerns and that is rooted as much in intellectual questioning and deliberation as it is in traditional modes of ‘planning’ for future growth and development.

This growing body of literature, while indeed broad, has a few key points of connection. First, it collectively demonstrates a keen interest in *cultural politics*. Emphasizing cultural politics means understanding that ‘politics’ is present in all realms of social life and becoming aware of how everyday interactions help us to recreate or produce new collective identities. Here we can see culture as a political *process* producing new symbols, needs, identities, and senses of solidarity or belonging. For development schemes in particular this would lead to the idea that top-down power is not the correct medium for the creation of “emancipated life-forms” and instead such creation requires cultural mobilization (Morrow and Torres 2002, 177). Indeed, Arturo Escobar, speaking of the very concrete eco-social struggles that have ensued with many modern development schemes writes, “people are recognizing that the struggle over land is ultimately a struggle over symbols and meanings – a cultural struggle” (Escobar 1995, 167). It is for this very reason that “eco” and “social” are here conflated. Within the context of this new emphasis on culture, agronomists, theologians, ecologists, social scientists, and development theorists alike are coming to the consensus that, “what is really needed for environmental concerns is fine-grained and culturally sensitive analysis” (Peet and Watts 1993, 248). With farming as a bond between people and the land-ecology, the culture of agriculture, then, becomes a highly relevant topic of concern.

The second point of connection to be highlighted here is that the thinkers of this new group identify ‘education’ as the way in which we are to progress to new, emancipatory ways of seeing the world. Specifically, they see any potential to solve the modern environmental ‘crisis’ and linked social troubles as rooted in a pedagogical approach. Indeed, there has been more than one demonstrative attempt to align the works of many authors (both self-identified postmodernists and not) who present the environmental crisis as principally an educational challenge for the “moral and cultural regeneration of modern publics” (Prakash 1995, 8). Furthermore and accordingly, such works have demonstrated the concurrent need to

reconceptualize the mission of education (and theory building) itself to be more aligned with the need to re-create cultures worldwide that are rooted in the care of the human and ecological intricacies of particular places.

Third, and last, this growing body of literature emphasizes the need to link theory and action with the assumption that ‘understanding’ the world and ‘changing’ the world must occur together (Edwards 1989, 124). In this way, we might find that it is reminiscent of Marx's discussion of the dialectics of ‘praxis’. With praxis – practical critical activity – our ideas (parts of a vision) shape matter (ecology/environment) and matter in turn modifies our ideas. In other words, a new, wholly formed environmental and social philosophy need not exist before practical action takes place but rather the two reinforce each other as each is negotiated and informed by the other (Easton 1970, 401).

Thus, what I have started to explore here is an active cultural education of sorts. I explore the prospect of a way of linking the notion of cultural identity or belonging – which possess, perhaps, a uniquely strong motivational force – with a participatory-type education regarding the ecological and social intricacies of particular places. What this entails, in effect, is the construction of a civic learning culture, and while this may seem, on one level, a rather basic idea, it is on another level, quite visionary. The hope is that by insisting on this bridge between culture and education with a particular sensitivity to context and place, what will emerge, as Madhu Prakash writes in “Ecological literacy for moral virtue,” is a “genre of research and praxis that is designed to remarry moral education and ecology” (Prakash 1995, 7). Prakash, speaking specifically of the postmodern educational philosophy of environmental scientist David Orr, talks of a pedagogical approach to growth, development, and ecological and social problem solving that “holistically reintegrates the moral with the ecological, the scientific with the aesthetic and ethical – weaving together the array of perspectives that moderns need to attend to in their quest to live ‘the good life’ in times morally difficult and ecologically destructive” (Prakash 1995, 5). Hence, Orr would seem to imply that it is precisely through and within this pedagogical process of constructing civic culture that “development” and “growth” in any area could be redirected (in a sustainable

way) for the twenty first century. The detail that I add to this notion in my South Jersey research is that ‘agriculture’ as a conceptual tool can provide a framework for this pedagogical process – perhaps a most useful framework because agriculture is a necessity no one can deny.

Labeling the new pedagogy

In thinking though this kind of agri-cultural pedagogy-based research, I have struggled with how to label it. Certainly, the pedagogical process about which I speak could be given a number of different names. Geographers, development theorists, agronomists, and cultural studies scholars might all offer varied suggestions. For example, one might conceive of this process as a sort of meta-postmodern (modern-postmodern) dialectics. Interestingly, development scholar Jan Pieterse indirectly refers to such dialectical progression with his explanation of a ‘new’ sort of “reflexive development” in “My paradigm or yours?” Pieterse claims that ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’ are merging as the critiques of one side influence – more and more quickly – the actions and theories of the other. This hastening of dialectics does not mean that we are moving closer to one homogenous approach to the growth and development of our communities, but rather, as geographer Edward Soja might explain, that we are entering a new time-space that contains a multiplicity of perspectives, which have never before been seen all at once (Soja 1996). What Soja and Pieterse each explain regarding open and reflexive ways of thinking is exactly the core of the new sort of learning that I, along with a great number of other writers, from Paulo Freire to David Orr to Arturo Escobar, have identified in other ways. This new learning is simultaneously a convergence of a diversity of particular perspectives and a breaking down of a series of confining boundaries. At its best, one might say this approach is an attempt to see our world from every angle. The point, most fundamentally, is to be simultaneously *open*, *non-totalizing* and *critical*.

This learning, of course, is linked to power in a very productive way for the cause of eco-social problem solving and community “development.” This learning is the process through which we negotiate and produce meaning, develop forms of community life, and

transform the social imagination. It is for this reason that I have chosen to refer to this pedagogical process as “transformative learning,” borrowing the term from the field of Community Economic Development, which gave me the original idea of intentional educational action. Still, labeling the process as “transformative learning” does not explicitly identify the trials and procedures I intend to set forth in its name. Is transformative learning simply the act of questioning? And, more importantly, how do we operationalize this questioning?

I find a helpful suggestion from another academic realm: the realm of critical Cultural Studies. One precise way that we can begin to act upon the idea of transformative learning is by deciding to examine particular cultural phenomena, or what Cultural Studies scholars might call cultural ‘texts’. By texts I am referring not just to written words (what we commonly think of as textual sources) but also to images, customs, habits, and general discourses that we might find within our given communities. We begin to critique, to question, and thus, to learn in a potentially transformational way about our own cultural practices and beliefs. Postmodern scholar Ben Agger describes this kind of learning best with the term *aporia*, by which he means the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in our cultural lives, which leave a vacancy of meaning that ensures the continual tentativeness of our ways-of-knowing. In other words, when we begin to critique, question, or, as Agger might say, to “deconstruct” cultural phenomena, *beneath the surface* we may find a newfound uncertainty with the values we place on certain objects and ideas (Agger 1993). But the purpose of the exercise, at least in the case of this thesis, is not to leave the *aporias* untouched. Instead, it is to use the recognition of these ambiguities as an entryway to community action and participatory planning. On the level of whole community, then, to critique or question a cultural text in the process of “transformative learning” is to exercise a communal desire to search our modern existence for *aporias*, to negotiate their ambiguities in meaning together, and in doing so to regain control over knowledge, becoming active subjects of the planning process.

Educational Activity

Evidently, by calling for questioning in transformative learning I am calling for a dismantling of the frameworks with which we typically view the world for the purposes of examination and critique. One might have asked, “How is questioning active or productive?” but with my last point on negotiation and control, I hope to have dispelled such a query. The productive activity inherent in transformational learning is the continual creation or re-creation of culture that ensues; each time educators or researchers engage a group or community to question or “deconstruct” a particular cultural phenomenon (what some scholars call a cultural ‘text’) they are themselves engaging in the process of cultural formation (the formation of new cultural texts). This is surely not my idea alone, especially in regard to theories of community education. In *Popular Culture and Critical Pedagogy* education theorists Tony Daspit and John Weaver write that students, teachers, and administrators have to become critical ‘readers’ of cultural ‘texts’ in order to “construct meaning out of their lives and develop ethical imperatives that serve as -- albeit temporary -- markers and springboards to promote democratic schools and societies . . .” (Daspit and Weaver 1999, xv).

In Chapter Two I offered a few concrete examples that might emerge from transformative learning based in agri-cultural theorizing. One of these was the model of critique coming from the research of geographer Julie Guthman, who addresses the meaning of the term ‘organic’ by examining its socio-political construction and who ends up calling into question previously valid associations of the term ‘organic’ with a type of farming done ‘in nature’s image’ (Guthman 1998). Another illustration of potential questioning came from the work of Ian Cook, Philip Craig, and Mark Thorpe who encourage the examination of foods as cultural artifacts and urge a questioning or “deconstruction” of food-shopping excursions in order to find what ambiguities they contain in regard to the origins of the commodities (Cook et al 1998). A third example came from the work of Lucy Jarosz and Joan Qazi, who discuss the social construction of “value” and “quality” in regard to the Washington Red Delicious apple and reveal how these constructions contrast with the reality

of local practices of agricultural intensification in Washington State (Jarosz 1999). There are numerous other examples coming from the field of agricultural geography to which to add to these three. Indeed, agriculturally-based 'transformational learning' could take an infinite number of paths in the context of any given local community.

Along these lines, I want to reiterate here that although I talk about some decisive agriculturally-based 'educational activity' above as though it will finally provide some 'answers,' to ecological and social problems, this is not really the accurate way to portray the situation. The form of enquiry to which I speak here is involved in a winding process of work towards epistemological change, which can never be complete. I find it helpful to describe it in the way that educational scholar McLaren describes his "pedagogy of liberation" in *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture*. Such a pedagogy,

. . . has no final answers . . . is always in the making, part of an ongoing struggle for critical understanding, emancipatory forms of solidarity, and the reconstitution of democratic public life . . . Education as cultural politics is not an absolute category, but one that is critically provisional, concretely utopian, and culturally specific (McLaren 1995, 57).

Furthermore, beyond the unsettled nature of such education, I want to make the point that not all academic work in agricultural geography need be of this active, participatory, deconstructive kind. There are a number of levels of participation and observation in research and academic work, which allow different yet potentially useful views of what is going on locally, regionally, globally (Edwards 1989, 134). We simply need to engage with these multiple levels of research in pragmatic ways, perhaps especially when it comes to questions of land, ecology, and agriculture, since the social-contestation of these categories are often overlooked in mainstream life. So, while it is indeed necessary to consider, as Simon and Edwards do, that including these new 'participatory', 'actor-oriented', 'community-dialogue' type methods is perhaps the only 'valid' way to move forward with any project of community development, we do not need to disregard the work of the rest of the academic world.

However, our approach to notions of rationality within the academy might well be changed. Geographers Richard Peet and Michael Watts claim that if "'rationality' is

reconceptualized in pragmatic terms as contextualized forms of ‘careful thinking’ the opportunity for an exchange of information about relations with environment is greatly enhanced” (Peet and Watts 1993, 248). This new notion of rationality comes from the acceptance that during the progression of “enlightenment” there can only be participants and furthermore that whatever general theory we may dream up, it cannot stipulate actual forms of agriculturally-attentive life, which are reached only through participants in dialogue (Morrow and Torres 2002). What comes of this shift in thinking is not the reformulation of a modernist normative claim about the future of the world, but rather the push to engage participants in a process of “conscientization” through agricultural dialogue whereby they come to discover how their knowledge forms, what their praxis means and can mean, and how they can come to live in ways that are more fully attentive to the human agro-ecology of their homeplaces (Morrow and Torres 2002, 177).

In terms of prompting community action – community attentiveness – through this conscientization we might want to pay particular attention to the idea of “affection.” One of the upshots of transformative learning is the fact that with the new kinds of knowledge that come about with transformative learning, people are able give more power to their affection for local land, economy, and ecology. This attention on emotion is significant because it has been largely untried in social science and thus demands further explanation. First, you may notice that the statement above assumes that individuals and communities would indeed have affection for the human ecology of their homeplaces. I imply this because having affection for the intricacies of ‘place’ is to be conceived as both product and factor of the dialectics of questioning culture and agriculture. The idea is that one’s affection grows as the learning process continues. This is not some wistful or naïve attempt to practice humanistic research but is part of the fundamental change to eco-social problem solving that theorists like Michael Edwards write about, which, they insist must include a willingness to “accept the role of emotion in understanding problems of development.” In fact, Edwards extends the significance of this change, calling for it to become a foundational premise such that “all education and development projects should begin with local people identifying the issues

about which they feel excited, hopeful, angry, anxious, or fearful” (Edwards 1989, 121).

Accordingly, this is how I begin my empirical work in Southern New Jersey.

It is also important to my empirical case study that Edwards describes the inclusion of emotion in research as a joint, communal, or negotiative process. By doing so he calls attention to the relational nature of human beings. Consequently, we begin to get an idea of “progress” as “development under the influence of love” where *social* “feeling” is perhaps placed above personal “feeling.” Development theorists Cowen and Shenton relate these ideas to the concepts of ‘another development,’ which they describe with phrases like: “small-scale solutions,” “ecological concerns,” “popular participation,” and “establishment of community.” They criticize this concept of development as utopian and not realistic writing that “Small is beautiful but it does not mean power” (Cowen and Shenton 1995, 33-35). Cowen and Shenton may be right on some level, but they may be mistaken on another. The hallmark features of utopian visions – things like smallness, community, and ecology – may actually be quite powerful as a result of the human emotions, values, and beliefs that have been attached to these ideas. I argue that the power of the small, the local, the ‘place’ could become quite formidable in regard to the planning of future growth and development. However, this must be done cautiously, as transformative learning suggests, with a questioning or critical eye, so that local communities are able to separate the progressive elements of the power of values, emotions, and beliefs from reactionary and potentially regressive elements.

An entryway to dialogue in South Jersey

I have sought to identify a particular analytical style for research in agricultural geography that is tied together by the idea that knowledge (at least for practical purposes) is what comes out of the negotiations of particular people in particular places and times. In other words, what comes to matter most in our academic work are the ideas about land and farm that communities negotiate together – coming to an interim, impermanent, or working consensus. Through a certain public ‘education’ in agriculture academics and community

people begin to navigate their general understandings of the region and world together, finding what it is that we care so deeply about that we call it “truth.” This is akin to Richard Rorty’s point (on a national level) in “Solidarity or Objectivity?” (Rorty 1991). Rorty calls such an approach “neo-pragmatism,” a particularly intriguing label for my study given that “pragmatism” is a term that has tended to sit well with local Americans. In a pragmatic worldview, it is accepted that people cannot rely on ‘objective’ universal law for practical, real-world decision making^a. Learning thus comes to be seen as a *communal* questioning or challenging, through dialogue and participation, of “what we ‘know’ and how we ‘know’ it” (Kilgore 2001, 55).

This conception of transformative learning is indeed the starting point for what I have tried to initiate in the Burlington County area of South Jersey – teaching how to think about cultural attentiveness to place through agriculture. The said function of this new kind of agricultural geography is to dispel alienation from land and place by engaging local residents in the communal negotiation of the wholeness of agriculture and the truths of their homeplace. As I have implied, this questioning can occur through a number of common educational means – that is, classes, seminars, workshops – but the main vehicle for transformation to identify for the broader purposes of South Jersey might be the simple act of dialogue.

Dialogue is important for a handful of reasons, some of which will be expressed in more detail below. What I would like to stress here in regard to dialogue is the necessity of radical openness that true dialogue demands. More specifically, I would like to stress the openness to *imagination* that dialogue requires. In the previous pages have spent much time emphasizing the need to be questioning or *critical* during activities of transformational learning, but in doing so I may have mistakenly underscored the equal importance of the imagination. I find that in my own work it is often difficult to merge the critical and imaginative minds. This may be true because the imaginative mind feeds off of emotion and beliefs that purposefully blind reality in certain ways. (In fact, it is precisely for this reason that I have stressed the importance of the critical.) Yet a problem emerges when the critical

^a For a relevant discussion of pragmatic theory in geography see Smith 1989

mind tends to close off the imaginative side. In working with people – with communities – we must remember that the very act of being *critical* or engaging in *critical* studies is itself a position to be, as it were, ‘critiqued.’ When we begin to work within communities, partaking in dialogue and other activities that are meant to be simultaneously educational and transformative, we will undoubtedly find ways to engage with the imaginative minds of local people; we will find ways to engage emotion, to play upon issues of cultural identity and belonging, and we must work carefully not to stifle the imaginative side that comes along with these matters. We might, for example, choose to *temporarily* suspend a critical stance during community dialogue, allowing for an upsurge of romanticisms and utopian dreams. These dreams and visions can later be examined for ‘untruths,’ ambiguities, or more accurately, reactive and regressive elements. A meaningful, transformational community dialogue must be ‘radically open’ enough to discover a balance between critique and imagination that can lead to progressive social action.

Assessing dialogue as collective action

This emphasis on radical openness in community dialogue inevitably leads me to the literature of *collective action*, which often includes discussion of such ideas as ‘deliberative democracy’, ‘democratic inquiry’, ‘social learning’, and even ‘deep democracy’. Such concepts are important to this research not only because they directly overlap with the ideas of community dialogue and transformational learning that we have just discussed, but also because we may find that various ways of problematizing collective action help to clarify the inevitable limitations of our trials with dialogue and transformation in South Jersey. It is possible to site numerous studies on collective action that have introduced important locational, logistical, social, and psychological factors, which seem to influence the dynamics of community negotiation and democratic inquiry. This scholarship may be helpful later when we begin to assess how, when, and why community-oriented dialogic activity in South Jersey may actually become transformational.

Some recent significant works on the subject of collective/community action include

Political Scientist Elinor Ostrom's "A Behavioral Approach to the Rational Choice Theory of Collective Action" (1998), Political Philosopher James Bohman's "Realizing Deliberative Democracy as a Mode of Inquiry" (2004), Politics Professor John Parkinson's "Legitimacy Problems in Deliberative Democracy" (2003), and Urban Studies Professor Howell Baum's "Ethical Behavior is Extraordinary Behavior; It's the Same as all other behavior a case study in community planning." (1998). These studies are, of course, only a sampling of a wide variety of potentially significant works, but their specific findings can help to alert us here to some key matters concerning collective action. Ostrom's focus is on rational choice modeling, through which she uncovers that social reputation and trust have marked affect on the occurrence of cooperative or collective behavior. Ostrom links reputation and trust to a third concept, reciprocity, in explaining that decision making in groups is decidedly reliant on whether individuals trust one another and that short-run, self-interest thinking can be replaced by long-range community-interest thinking *if* mutual cooperation and reciprocity are seen as 'givens' of the working situation. In terms of this thesis, understanding the importance of trust, reputation, and reciprocity in collective action can help us to understand not simply the dynamics of my initial individual and group conversations as they relate to community planning, but more broadly, why the community dialogue on agriculture that I begin with this thesis research might be sustained, or conversely why it might fizzle out in the future.

In contrast to Ostrom's focus on rational choice models, both Bohman and Parkinson focus on the idea of 'deliberative democracy,' an approach to communal decision-making that is akin to the community dialogue I have described above^b. Bohman and Parkinson problematize the principles of the political concept by pointing out some ways that 'deliberation' (or communal reflection and negotiation) breaks down in practice. Thus, complementing Ostrom, they further remind us of potential normative constraints, social

^b According to the Deliberative Democracy Consortium, deliberative democracy deals with "decision-making in which citizens consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about options before them and enlarge their perspectives, opinions, and understandings." (Deliberative Democracy Consortium 2004, accessible online at <http://www.deliberative-democracy.net/faq/>)

factors, and procedural requirements that influence the *transformational* success of the kind of deliberative processes (i.e., community dialogue or intentional educational action) that I seek in South Jersey. The constraints and requirements that Bohman and Parkinson highlight include ideas like trust and reciprocity but also go beyond such issues in important ways. In particular, John Parkinson finds that ensuring “genuine deliberation,” where all of those affected by collective decision-making participate openly and equally, becomes more difficult at a large scale. Parkinson asserts that if conversation or dialogue gets too big, “deliberation breaks down,” and claims that “very little in mass public communication merits the label, ‘deliberative’” (Parkinson 2003, 181). In portraying what might be true ‘deliberation’ Parkinson describes a desire (for planning or politics) to come up with some form of “interpersonal reasoning” (reasoning beyond individual competing interests), but suggests that politics/planning must come up with ways in which rhetoric, speech-making and other forms of mass communication can be made more legitimate (in terms of inclusiveness of more/all peoples/voices). In other words, Parkinson concludes that it may be possible to allow for openness and participation in larger settings (such as public meetings), but it requires more work. In the coming chapters then, as we analyze my initial attempts at dialogue and transformational learning in South Jersey, it seems important to keep in mind this issue of scale in collective action. This may be perhaps particularly true in regard to the January 8 community forum, in which ‘conversation’ or ‘deliberation’ clearly takes place at a larger scale than individual and group interviews.

Howell Baum’s work on social and psychological influences on ethics adds to Parkinson’s work by examining community participation as ethical behavior in community planning. Similar to Parkinson, Baum describes a moral desire in planning to make room for full participation by *all* members/citizens of a given community/neighborhood. Although this all-inclusiveness is an ideal, or rather an ethic, of community planners, participation often becomes biased (not all/equally inclusive) as a result of first, practical conditions (i.e., planners inviting those they know to meetings), second, ambiguities about the world (i.e.,

questions about who actually makes up the community and who will live there in the future), and third, ambivalence in human incentives and attachments (i.e., the need for balancing loyalties) (Baum 1998). Such findings have relevance for assessing the real-world transformational success of 'learning as planning' (intentional educational action) in community settings. Thus, in addition to the just-mentioned issue of scale we will want to keep in mind these kinds of socio-psychological constraints on collective or cooperative action as we contemplate the successes and failures of community dialogue in South Jersey.

The four works that I have just mentioned all focus on constraints on collective action -- either how communication is made difficult or why communal objectives might not be met despite clearly defined goals. Yet other scholars have taken a different approach to examining the dynamics of collective action, looking at how activism is framed either locally, regionally, or globally and how this framing informs the collective acting itself. One example of this kind of study from within geography is the work of Deborah Martin, "'Place-Framing' as Place-Making: Constituting a Neighborhood for Organizing and Activism" (2003). Here Martin attempts to show how place informs social action, explaining how in community organizing the setting, location, and social-spatial context of 'place' may be useful in forming a collective identity that can sustain social action. Particularly she finds that by drawing on people's (daily life) lived experiences in a place, a strong activist discourse can be created that potentially de-emphasizes other existing collective identities (such as race/ethnicity).

Martin's work seems relevant to my trials in South Jersey precisely because it emphasizes the potential utility of geographical contextualizing for collective action. Indeed, although I have explained that my potentially transformative dialogue tries for openness and inclusion of all kinds of social identity, my idea for transformation in South Jersey does, in a way, privilege 'place' as particularly important to identity building. Of course, unlike the discourses of specific community organizations that Martin studies, the dialogue that I set forth is meant to allow for *multiple ways* of framing collective behavior; unlike the

community organizations, I do not search for one agreed-upon set of local concerns and objectives. Yet, I *do* describe dialogue as a collective action that has very much to do with the geographic context within which it is set, and thus, Martin's final conclusion that 'place' can be a positive frame for activism on numerous scales (local, regional, global) speaks well for my dialogic trials.

In terms of motivating collective action, Martin shows how 'place' becomes a legitimate tool for community organizing. In Martin's case studies community groups focus on shared experiences of place in their discourses, using them dialectically to both convey and create a *particular kind* of place-based identity (based on organizational goals). As a motivational tool for action this works because each organization is explicit about its particular diagnoses (problems) and prognoses (solutions) for the local area (Martin 2003). In terms of my dialogic research in South Jersey, which attempts to begin without specific diagnostic or prognostic claims, the legitimacy of place as a basis or 'frame' for community organizing is clear so long as transformational dialogue/learning does not seek to replace any one of the varied multiple cultural identities found in South Jersey with an already-decided geographic-spatial identity. Instead the dialogue must ask more openly whether, in a rather primary way, a geographic-spatial *element* to identity can merge with all of the cultural/social identities that already exist in South Jersey.

Of course, it would be absurd to demand that more specific ideas (diagnoses, prognoses) about place are not formed during the process of dialogue. On the contrary, using place as a frame for collective action must inevitably lead to particular ideas about one's geographical context, specific goals for the future within this context, and specialized ideas for problem-solving here. Yet, we must consider in assessing the process of transformational learning in South Jersey, what matters most for collective action may not be the actual intellectual content or the specific ideas that emerge as dialogue advances but instead the basic *communal hope* that the process creates. Perhaps, as Howell Baum points out, although our collective dialogic activity cannot avoid all 'bias,' and although our language may often

come from specific discourses with specific ideologies and specific ways of picturing the future, these particularities are of less consequence to activism than is the simple discovery of faith that there is a communal way into the future (Baum 1998, 423). From here we can begin to locate the radical openness in community dialogue that seems necessary for transformational learning across all 'groups' or 'levels'.

On this note, in the remaining two sections of this chapter I detail the particular methods of community dialogue that I have used in my South Jersey research. I begin by considering a specific model of dialogue -- the model of Deep-Dialogue -- that seems most crucial for radical openness. My consideration of Deep-Dialogue includes examination of both patterns for discussion as well as places that seem particularly suited for Deep-Dialogue as a form of intentional educational action or transformative learning. Next, I explain how I have adapted Deep-Dialogue to my work in South Jersey, looking at specific techniques as well as the reasoning behind those individuals I chose to consult during the research process. Finally, I end the chapter with a section that both clarifies the choice of Burlington County as a site for my investigation and offers a brief review of the current realities of landscape planning and agriculture in the county today.

Transformation and Deep Dialogue

Deepening community negotiation

Deep-Dialogue is a model for human interaction, developed by the Global Dialogue Institute (GDI), which may help us determine the logistics of how we would like to move forward with community negotiation in South Jersey. The founders of the Global Dialogue Institute have described deep dialogue in this way:

When we speak of "dialogue," we do not mean just another discussion, as valuable as that might be. We mean an experience of meeting with people of different fundamental convictions in such a way that each one's assumptions come to light, and that all can move ahead in reciprocal learning. We mean strengthening and affirming fundamental beliefs and practices, and transforming them as well. Most

importantly, participants in dialogue will be energized not only for themselves but also to inspire others with a realistic vision of a healthy, humane, just, and prosperous world, and concrete plans for realizing it” (Swidler 1998).

It would be wonderful if there were an easy, step by step document explaining the how-to of the application of Deep-Dialogue. However, this would most undoubtedly override the central intentions of the Deep-Dialogue concept. Indeed the first point to realize about Deep-Dialogue is that, as the founders of the GDI write, “each application will be custom designed” (GDI 1999, 12). In this way, the methodology might be likened to participatory action research (PAR). Participatory action research is a kind of qualitative or naturalistic research that is based in the ideas of practice-as-inquiry and critical reflection and that can take a wide variety of forms. Due to its reflective, reflexive nature, participatory action research defies identification with one particular methodology or mode of inquiry. Instead, methods are invented, negotiated, and re-worked in practice (Seymour-Rolls and Hughes 1995, Newman 2000). That said, there is a way to describe the action-research method of “deep dialogue” (in the sense I mean it and intend to use it) which clarifies some of the ambiguities of the GDI’s wonderfully visionary language.

The dialogic methods I seek are indeed ways of encountering and understanding the idea of oneself in the world. Thus, they do not stop short at trying to grasp life’s “deepest levels” – the fundamental purposes of human existence. We critically look at our individual and communal mental and corporal responses to our relatedness to land, place, and each other (community). Like Deep-Dialogue, the deep dialogue I seek is about challenging and thus changing (together) our formative sets of beliefs. Most basically then, deep dialogue can be identified as an encounter, usually a conversation, with others in which all parties enter with an awareness that the purpose of the encounter is to gain new insight into their own lives-in-place in Burlington County. Beyond this basic methodological description, the GDI offers three specific dimensions of Deep-Dialogue, which may be considered the pillars of the approach. I have re-phrased their suggestions to help us further understand the method for its use in practice:

- First, a deep dialogue encounter would be one in which all parties involved enter into conversation with an eye for ethical systems, and particularly with the intent to find common ground within divergent ethical systems.
- Second, a deep dialogue encounter would be one in which all parties enter into conversation with an eye to dualisms (dichotomous thinking), and particularly with the intent to overcome them.
- Third, and perhaps most difficult, a deep dialogue encounter would be one in which all parties enter into conversation with an eye to the varying ways in which individuals and groups understand the meaning of life (GDI 1999).

I label the third methodological principle as the hardest because in the world beyond the academic realm of philosophical and religious studies, it is probably hardest to initiate discussion with others about meanings of life. However, this may ultimately be the most important principle for my research in South Jersey. I say this because by contextualizing my research in the Burlington County region, I am not simply saying that I am interested in the meaning of life, but rather that I am interested in the meaning of life-in-place. I seek to discover what is meaningful about life placed in Burlington County? What, if anything, is meaningful about sense of place and sense of belonging there? Meanings of life are from where spring ethics and principles of behavior. By looking at differences in meanings of life-in-place in South Jersey, and by consciously trying to appreciate our own and others expressions of these meanings *equally*, we begin to move to an important “common ground” in which “right” behavior thrives. This common ground is what the GDI refers to as “an effective technology of life in which individuals and communities flourish,” but what I have referred to with phrases like ‘sustainable ways of life’ or ‘a caring eco-social reality’ (GDI 1999, 7). Certainly such movement to common ground is what Deep-Dialogue is all about and what my own deep dialogue tries to initiate on a small scale in South Jersey. In this way my work coincides with the work of the Global Dialogue Institute but I have chosen to bring dialogue down to the very ‘earthy’ level of local agri-*culture* – a scale that has seen little Deep-Dialogue activity to-date.

To reiterate an earlier point here, my focus on the local is not meant to valorize localness for all that it is or may be. I focus on the local scale both because the smaller scale

local setting is where I have found an entryway to work in South Jersey and because I find that in South Jersey the potentially compelling forces of human attachment, affection, or emotion in general, can be found quite readily at this scale. Plainly, neither I nor the creators of the method Deep-Dialogue would suggest the suspension of dialogue at other (non-local) levels. Dialogue needs to happen not only within localities, but also across localities. In addition, it should be quite clear that the 'local' is itself an ambiguous term. In my research I broadly identify my local area as the Burlington County region of South Jersey, but there are no clear cut borders to this classification. Certainly people, information, and ideas move quickly in and out of this given area and understanding such non-local connectedness (if we can call it that) is important to the future of South Jersey. Yet, focusing on the local in dialogue can be crucial as well; my focus on the local in this thesis allows me to insert the idea that localities are not just comprised of people, but that they are more like whole organisms, as geographer Vidal de la Blache might say, made up of a complex series of 'others' that tend to be more planted in place (less mobile) than humans. Clearly, in planning for more sustainable ways of living, these more rooted 'others' demand consideration as well, and this I seek to accomplish through the process of local deep dialogue.

I have identified the principles of the dialogic methodology of deep dialogue, but let us now examine the forms deep dialogue might take. Above, I hint that deep dialogue is usually a conversation. This quite true of the way that I have conceived it. Deep-Dialogue has been used in seminars, retreats, workshops, courses, and conferences. In most of these cases, verbal exchange is the most common means of communication. People exchange ideas through a mixture of speeches, storytelling, panel discussions, small group meetings, and informal conversations. Similarly, I planned to attempt my own deep dialogue in South Jersey through verbal exchange on the level of one-to-one interviews, larger focus-groups (seminar-style setting), and still larger conference type events.

Yet, as the GDI makes clear, deep dialogue does not have to stop at the level of verbal exchange. In the workings of the institute, "Dialogue" is not only about *talking* but

also about “dialogical patterns of thought and living” (GDI 1999, 9). Dia-logue here is being used in the root-sense of the word to refer to a *logos*-centric way of life (in opposition to ego-centric monologue). In other words, it is an approach to being in the world and relating in the world in ways that consciously try to move (individually and collectively) towards the universal *logos* (the common ground out of which different worldviews are created) and out of “ego space” where this common ground is overlooked (GDI 1999, 3). Thus, in a very important way it is behavior oriented. Here we do not simply talk about finding our common ground but by becoming self-reflective we start in small ways to live and act with consciousness directed at commonality or communion between ourselves and others.

Of course, it must be said that this does not portend an elimination of the ‘individual’ at all, simply a recognition that all individuals (in their inherent connectedness and relationality) have a common ground to find. Furthermore, it must be said that the idea of moving towards *logos*-centric ways of life (or *logos*-space) is an ideal of Deep-Dialogue. The way dialogue works out in real research situations – and its relative deepness – will inevitably diverge in multiple ways from this ideal. Perhaps then, such talk of *logos*-space and *ego*-space seems a rather complex idealistic philosophy of communication to be brought up in the context of pragmatic action research and planning. Yet, interestingly literature on methods of Community Economic Development is not void of such theoretical lines of thought. In fact, planner Patricia Wilson specifically makes reference to the need for individuals in community planning to surpass the “egoistic sense of self” and to create “links to . . . a universal source” (Wilson 1996, 4). The idea of focusing on not only our inherent relationality but also on some inherent commonness becomes vital to the possibility of ‘lived’ sustainability in our communities.

When we begin to consider the possibility of deep dialogue not only through talking but also through other dialogical ways of being then we begin to make sense of a method for research that can be applicable to all aspects of community life – from larger economic strategies all the way down to the family. This “method” goes beyond research

because individuals not only use deep dialogue in “programmed” planning activities that go on at the local level, but they may also appreciate the concept internally and use it to reflect on their own lives. We can ask how ‘deep’ are our interactions with ‘others’ around us? Or, in a specifically agri-cultural sense we might ask two further questions: How ‘deep’ are our interactions with the non-human ‘others’ around us? And, could attentiveness to agriculture be a way to ‘deepen’ our interactions with both human and non-human communities?

Through maintaining such a reflective outlook, deep dialogue can be used for both programmed planned discussion and lived, life-rooted praxis all at once. In this way, the civic potentials of agriculture (or ‘civic agriculture’) as discussed previously, might take on fuller or ‘deeper’ meaning. Recall that agricultural theorist Laura DeLind criticized the kinds of initiatives that are currently labeled as ‘civic agriculture’ maintaining that ‘awareness’ (especially of consumer choices in food systems) does not equate with civic engagement. However, the concept of deep dialogue through agriculture allows for a growing or dialectical awareness of place and self-in-place that is not only life-rooted but that is designed to push for more and more dialogical engagement with a variety of ‘others’ in community. Thus, we might argue that building this kind of life-rooted awareness does, undeniably, begin to open us to the fullest potentials of civic engagement in agriculture.

I say this, of course, with the implication that in South Jersey we have not begun yet to open to these ideas. Accordingly, my own concept of the methodology of deep dialogue, like Deep-Dialogue, is designed to work in all areas of our cultural life or agri-cultural life “where communication or discourse breakdown” (GDI 1999, 10). Yet, many in Southern New Jersey may not think of their communities as places in which communication or discourse has broken down. Certainly municipal planning and township-led social events seem to be flourishing in some areas of Burlington County. However, it is quite clear, when one looks at the landscape – with strip-mall and suburban development alongside small towns, rail-lines, and farms – that the meaning of life-in-place in Burlington County is enormously contested. There is a breakdown or severance in communication and communion

with ‘others’ (other people as well as other parts of the land and landscape), which has been largely ignored and which begs for resolution. The question becomes, then, one of logistics: not so much *how* to begin deep dialogue within and among the communities of South Jersey but *where* to begin such methods of community communication and communion. Because we are dealing with ideas of community learning here an obvious first choice are the places that have already been set up as centers for community education. This includes both places of outreach on a non-formal educative level as well as places of formal higher education like local colleges or universities. I turn now to consider the community college as a place of particular significance for this research.

Community Higher Education

In this thesis I have previously made explicit my particular concern with higher, adult, or public education and specifically with the idea of the community or county college. The reason for this concern is quite simple; if we see wisdom as rather subjective in a relational, communal sense then it makes sense that a quest for learning would begin in an educational institution that is designed for and situated within a particular community. In other words, as educational theorists Bob Teasdale and Zane Ma Rhea write, if we see wisdom as “not a series of objective details but embodied in individuals within the social resonance of specific localities,” then the design of a place of education for and within those specific localities – those communities – would seem to follow quite logically (Teasdale and Rhea 2000, 2).

This emphasis on the community college fits well with the particular ‘need’ for cultural attentiveness that I have identified previously; that is, my call to assess cultural identity in relation to land and agriculture, and specifically to look at how models of thinking have influenced the relative situatedness or alienatedness of people’s identities in relation to land and place. Certainly, the case example I have been advancing all along is the idea of looking at the industrial mindset – how it has been entrenched in the culture of various social

institutions and how it has affected people's alienation from community, land, and place. Yet, I do not wish to pretend that this kind of contextual, place-bound assessment of our ways of thinking and feeling is a fixed or entirely sufficient way to advance a 'caring' social and ecological reality. My emphasis on the community college is equally important because it recognizes that places of higher education – universities, colleges – still produce “many of the ideas and much of the information that enable/disable the rich diversity of ways of knowing about our planet that will ensure a good quality of life for all of us” (Teasdale and Rhea 2000, 1). This certainly brings some appreciation for broader structures and global scales into our picture of 'learning,' especially in relation to environmental concerns like ecological preservation and “sustainability.”

Indeed, Teasdale and Rhea write in *Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education* that the coming of the Bruntland Report, which defined and coined the term 'sustainability,' gave rise to significant concerns about the role institutes of higher education have in the production of 'knowledge.' Above all it showed that in regard to modern eco-social concerns, “the ability to control what ideas are seen as legitimate has never been more crucial” (Teasdale and Rhea 2000, 12). Hence we may use a focus on community colleges to appreciate, as the foundational metaphor of my South Jersey research “under the stars” intimates, that while we may see learning – the cultivation of wisdom – as a “local affair,” it is one that “directly influences planetary survival” (Teasdale and Rhea 2000, 13). This realization links us back to my concluding suggestion from Chapter One that perhaps we ought to be alert to various approaches in research (in the academy as a whole and in geography in particular) not only for what they offer in terms of data gathering and analysis but also for what they reveal to us about *ideology*. I offered that by reflecting on ideology in research and by becoming reflexive in regard to the purposes of our academic work, we become aware of the possibility of a dialectical relationship between real-world trends and academic trends.

For the specific purposes of South Jersey, we may now recognize a depth of

meaning in the idea of local farmers and local academics working together. As my above explanations of deep dialogue would suggest, such “work” can involve specific projects or initiatives (for controlling growth or for sustainable development, say), but it also may grow into a kind of everyday cooperative behavior that springs from the very emotional and/or ‘spiritual’ wells from which we draw our identities. For now, in South Jersey we set out from very initial stages of dialogue. This means that as a start, local farmers, local academics, and eventually local ‘students’ of all kinds, need to begin to speak to each other and get to know one another in face-to-face encounters. People need to begin speaking, networking, and knowing each other by name in order to begin preparing for eventual deep[er] dialogue. Thus, in my empirical research in South Jersey I use a local community college – The Burlington County Community College (BCC) – as a base from which to develop an initial stage of networks and conversation flows in the region.

Methods in Context

Beginnings

I begin the process of making connections and initiating dialogue in the South Jersey region during the summer months of 2004. Because much of my inquiry regards the Burlington County Community College as a central point from which to begin pedagogical outreach, I decide to begin my empirical data collection there – on a sunny day in May on the main campus of BCC in Pemberton, NJ. Interestingly, my work with Burlington County culture and agriculture begins at an end: the commencement ceremonies of Burlington County College’s graduating class of 2004. I attend the ceremonies not so much to witness the handing over of the diplomas, which takes place in the green behind Parker Dining Center alongside a forest of native pines, but rather to ensure that I connect with a number of Burlington County College faculty before they go into hiding during the steamy months of summer vacation. My attendance is fruitful as I come across a handful of professors who will

be the first of the eventual thirty interviewees that I speak with in-depth during these summer months. Their interest in the topic is initially cautious; many are unsure that their professional work has anything important to do with Burlington County culture and agriculture. They offer e-mails and phone numbers nevertheless and hence, I begin my investigation.

Obviously, my investigation centers on 'educators' – first formal educators, working at Burlington County College, and later non-formal educators working on public outreach for various local governmental and non-governmental organizations. In addition, during the summer months of my initial dialogic research, I integrate conversations with a variety of top administrators and policy-makers in the county, as well as with a few agriculturists, all of whom have an interest in and an influence on public outreach and education. I do this not only to gather data from them but also to alert them to a new dialogue being brought forth in Burlington County and to gather their reaction to the threads of this new dialogue. Not surprisingly, a common reaction to the dialogue I advance is a suggestion regarding who else in the county might be interested in or relevant to my study. Thus as it works out, there are broadly two kinds of informants in my initial dialogic research. First are the *intentional* informants, those who I identify for inclusion as a result of their known status in the county as educational leaders of some sort (informal educators, formal educators, educational administrators, or county administrators with relevance to public education). Second are the circumstantial informants, those who I happen upon or who approach me after my initial list of (intentioned) informants had been set.

In terms of gathering a diversity of opinions, I try to create a group of thirty respondents that it as all-inclusive in terms of age, job-description, place of residence, and length of residence in the region, as possible. (See appendix 1 for a listing of all job titles in the sample). In Burlington County the identified group of respondents represents a well-rounded sample of the existing educational leadership who would be the primary figures to carry out agricultural dialogue. However it is important to note that this group cannot

attempt to be all-inclusive in terms of class, race, extent of education, and social status; the reality of the situation here in South Jersey as it is in many other places across North America, is that those individuals with ‘power,’ so to speak, tend to be the Caucasian and upper middle class citizens who have had at least some education beyond the college level. The values and ways of thinking of these individuals may not or may not be representative of the greater population, but either way, these figures are the ones in leadership positions today. I enter into my dialogic research fully aware of this limitation, and have tried to use the January 8 community forum as a way to include a greater diversity of voices in conversation.

In this investigation, much of the dialogue – most of my conversations – are loosely structured. Although my research is centered on a set of scheduled, semi-structured interviews, (See appendix 3a and 3b for a sample of semi-structured interview questions) I also rely on many unscheduled kinds of dialogue: drop-in conversations, impromptu meetings, chance encounters, and the like. During both the ‘official’ scheduled interviews and the spontaneous interactions, I opt for a candid and enthusiastic tone over formality in discussion. Over the course of the summer months, a few of my scheduled interviews become focus groups, more as a result of interviewees increased interest in my topic of research than as a result of prescribed planning on my part. Of course, I welcome the focus group structure, as a greater number of voices and opinions seem to lessen tensions and leads to more vigorous dialogue. (See table 3.1 for an explanation of the time frame and exact record of all dialogic activities).

Table 3.1 Dialogic Activity Time Frame

Individual Semi-Structured Interviews		
Date	Participant	Later contributions
5/26/04	Assistant Professor of English, BCC	
6/1/04	Burlington County Agricultural Agent	forum panelist
6/8/04	Student Activities Coordinator, BCC	
6/8/04	Professor of Economics, BCC	
6/8/04	Professor of Biology, BCC	forum committee
6/9/04	Professor of Psychology and Sociology, BCC	
6/25/04	Director of Libraries, BCC	
6/29/04	Food Sciences Academic Program Director, BCC	
6/29/04	Vice President, BCC	forum welcome speaker

Table 3.1 (Continued) Dialogic Activity Time Frame

7/9/04	Operations Manager, BCC Radio	forum committee
7/9/04	Assistant Professor of Geology, BCC	
7/18/04	Professor of Philosophy, BCC	forum committee
8/3/04	Director of Burlington Co. Div. of Cultural and Heritage Affairs	
8/3/04	Education Coordinator, Pinelands Commission	
8/3/04	Professor of Chemistry, BCC	
8/3/04	Assistant Professor of Biology, BCC	forum committee
8/10/04	Professor of Environmental Science, BCC	
8/10/04	Farmer, retired BCC Board Member	forum committee

Individual Informal Communications

Time Frame	Participant	Type of Communication	Later Contributions
5/04 – 6/04	NJ Naturalist and Singer/Songwriter	in-person, email	
6/04 – 9/04	Farmer, NJ Farm Bureau Women's Committee	in-person	forum publicity
6/04, 11/04	Student Body Senator, BCC	in-person, email	forum welcome speaker
6/04 – 1/05	Food Services Coordinator, BCC	in-person, email	forum food preparation
7/04 – 9/04	President, BCC	in-person, mail	forum funding
8/04 – 9/04	Assistant Professor of Philosophy, BCC	in-person, email	
8/04 – 1/05	Program Coordinator, Pinelands Institute for Natural and Environmental Studies (PINES)	in-person, phone	forum committee
8/04, 1/05	Pesticide Program Coordinator, NJ Env. Fed.	in-person, phone	forum panelist
9/04 – 1/05	Organic Farmer	in-person, phone	forum panelist
12/04 – 1/05	Associate Professor of English, BCC	in-person, email	forum panelist

Group Interviews

Date	Participants
5/28/04	1. Burlington County Director of Economic Development and Regional Planning, 2. County Clerk and Administrator
7/11/04	1. Professor of Fine Arts, BCC, 2. Scientist, Pinelands Commission, 3. Professor of Philosophy, BCC
8/6/04	1. Naturalist, Pinelands Preservation Alliance, 2. President, Pinelands Preservation Alliance 3. Professor of Philosophy, BCC
8/6/04	1. Head Coordinator, Burlington County Farm Fair, 2. Coordinator, Burlington Co. Farm Fair
8/10/04	1. Events and Volunteer Programs Coordinator, Whitesbog Preservation Trust, 2. Farmer, Whitesbog Board Member, and Original Owner

Structured Forum Planning Meetings

Date	Purpose	Participants (outside of FPC)
08/29/04	Formation of the Forum Planning Committee (FPC)	
09/17/04	Discussion: division of responsibilities, event optimum size	
10/21/04	Discussion: advertisement in spring course booklet and mailings	Assoc. director community services, BCC
11/18/04	Discussion: Farms and food donations, composition of panel	
12/21/04	Final event planning, pickup food donations, meal planning, a/v recording	Director, telecommunications, BCC

Table 3.1 (Continued) Dialogic Activity Time Frame

Community Forum Event	
Date	Participants
1/8/04	100+ resident participants from Burlington and neighboring counties including teachers, administrators, professors, vegetable farmers, dairy and horse farmers, students, retired professionals, architects and landscape architects, scientists, craftsmen, and homeowners.

Shortly into my initial interview process I recognize a trajectory for my research that not only seems crucial for the advancement of holistic agricultural dialogue in South Jersey, but also seems a most legitimate representation of what I am doing. I find the need to present my dialogic work not simply as a series of interviews, but more fully as a new initiative in Burlington County. At first, I name this dialogue-based initiative the Initiative for Civic Agriculture. Later, as I work with others on planning the January 2005 community forum that is to be the culmination of my research activities (but certainly not the end of the dialogue), I find that the event's theme, "Re-Connecting our Lives to the Land" may resonate as a better way to describe the initiative. Nevertheless, from the beginning I find that the naming of my project as a particular initiative with a particular conference or community forum event in mind gives a momentum to my dialogue in South Jersey that I could not have seen otherwise. I witness the possibilities for cultural learning through agri-cultural questioning increase dramatically as I provide visible structure to my dialogue. I do so with fliers and later colorful brochures describing in memorable and popular ways the lines of questioning that the initiative encourages (See appendix 4a and 4b for copies of flier and brochure). Of course, I also direct people's attention to the intent (of a growing forum committee) to hold a community forum in which we explore the civic potentials of agriculture and negotiate the "wholeness" of agriculture in our county. I describe this as a way of getting the "word" out, or rather, getting individuals in the South Jersey region thinking about our individual and collective futures in *place*. As more and more individuals explore this idea, we begin to work towards planning an event scheduled for January 8, 2005.

Questioning

Now, as pieces of a new initiative, my interviews take on slightly new meaning. However, they still must act to answer the central question of the thesis. That is, in a way that helps me to assess the efficacy of (deep) dialogue in planning, my interviews must work to answer the following question:

To what *practical* extent do South Jersey residents find legitimacy with the suggestion that we can use local agriculture as a foundation for deepening our sense of place and stewardship in the county?

In the introductory chapter I simplified this thesis question into four research questions that I designed to enlighten the central methodological and conceptual concerns of my work as it pertains to the South Jersey region. I now address each in turn explaining how I operationalize them during the interview process. (Note that a sampling of the kinds of questions used in semi-structured interviews have been provided in appendix 3a and 3b)

(a) What *is* a “substantive” attentiveness to “place” and what does small-scale farming have to do with it in South Jersey?

This is the primary ‘visioning’ question that I pose under a variety of guises in conversation to educators and other decision-makers in South Jersey. I ask interviewees about their opinions, dreams, and fears for the Burlington County region and whether or not (or how) these desires correspond with the agricultural heritage and modern agricultural realities of the county. With the posing of this question the meanings of terms like ‘substantive’ and ‘place’ begin to be filled out.

(b) To what extent does higher, adult, or public education in the region seek to promote attentiveness to county agro-ecology?

I find answers to this question by inquiring about existing courses or outreach opportunities in the county that in some way link regional residents to local agriculture. I ask professors to explain any courses, clubs, and events offered at Burlington County College that they see as relevant to agriculture or ecology, even if they see connections in only marginal ways. If none come to mind, I offer suggestions as to the marginal kinds of connection that might be found. From lessons on soil formation and groundwater storage to

creative writing assignments on seasonal change or culinary traditions, I question about anything that might connect students' minds with issues of agro-ecology. Similarly, I ask naturalists, outreach coordinators, and administrators to explain their educational strategies and ideals. Again, I probe for agricultural connections. How important is connecting to the land in their work? Both in cases of formal and non-formal education, when an interviewee and I do come across a course or event that we together decide is relevant, I inquire about any written or intended "purposes" of the program. We look together at the content of such programs and how we might assess programs or courses in terms of "outcomes."

(c) What are the notable paths and barriers to a cultural politics rooted in regional agriculture?

I pose this question in conversation in a variety of ways. First, in negotiating the relevance of particular programs or courses with the educators as I do with question two, I also probe their willingness and enthusiasm in trying to come up with new ways of creating more agro-ecological attentiveness in their work. I also question educators and administrators more directly as to what they believe to be the practical constraints and available resources for the kind of visions of place-attentiveness that I propose with this thesis. I specifically ask for their opinions on these constraints and resources first as local 'educators' and then as local residents (if applicable). In dialogue I try to assess what is it about life or work in Burlington County that makes attentiveness to local agriculture and local ecology easy or hard. Or, more plainly, I try to assess together with my interviewees whether or not this kind of attentiveness seems at all important, and if so why?

(d) To what extent does and can the pedagogical approach of adult education in the region encourage cultural self-reflection?

This query is most directly related to my desire to probe the applicability of critical questioning to agri-*cultural* geography in and through the process of dialogue. Again, I operationalize this question in both direct and indirect ways: Indirectly, I engage interviewees in conversations in which I and they, together, begin to reflect on culture in South Jersey. Following my example, we articulate our beliefs and feelings about life-in-place in the county

and we question or perhaps ‘deconstruct’ the how’s, why’s, and who’s of what we ‘think’ and ‘know’ about the region. With such dialogic activity we reach beyond the simple visioning of “substantive attentiveness to place” that I explained in question one, to assess what it is about our ways of life that might be allowing or disallowing these visions. Also, in a way that discusses cultural questioning more directly, I hint at ideas of “transformative learning” in my interviews using a simple metaphors and examples to explain the vision of transformation through “learning” and “education” that I describe earlier in this chapter. I engage others in discussing not the content of relevant courses and programs but rather the *techniques* of teaching that seem to be important. In terms of cultural learning, I ask, what can we expect from current programs and what can we hope for with future changes? Should and can we hope for cultural re-connection to the land in Burlington County?

The descriptions of how I operationalize this last research question should make clear that I manage the above questions *in dialogue* in order to assess the efficacy of *dialogue* in addressing fundamental eco-social concerns in South Jersey. In other words, these are not only questions about South Jersey that I look to assess for the region through my deep qualitative analysis of the current situation in Burlington County but they are also functions of the pedagogical process I have investigated for agri-cultural geography. All of these questions, indeed, form the basis for an exercise in “transformative learning” performed by community members in South Jersey. They simultaneously inform us of the circumstances of education and agriculture in South Jersey (per the negotiation of the ‘truths’ of these circumstances by local residents) and enlighten us as to the benefits and drawbacks of the pedagogical process of deconstruction itself. Therefore, my analysis of data in this thesis includes examining my own interaction with regional residents as itself a deep-dialogical process of education that is directed by ideals of cultural learning and self-reflection. However, I want to make clear that the discussion of my empirical research in this thesis does not include any sort of direct “measurement” in the way that it is normally conceived. That is, I do not attempt to prove any given extent to transformation in Burlington County or any

rating or scoring of the success of dialogue here. Instead my research questions are answered through thick description and cautious evaluation in what might be described as an “active ethnographic” style.

Bringing in depth

So far I have addressed how I operationalize the central questions of my research but I have not been explicit about the deep-dialogical aspects of my methods. Truly, it is quite difficult to offer details about how deep dialogue works without providing often word-for-word transcriptions of the method in action. This is because, as I have highlighted earlier, depth in dialogue should be considered more as an ideal than as hard fact. In Chapter Four, as part of my data analysis, I present some detailed examples that show how one might work toward greater depths. Here I would like to explain briefly how it is that I try to bring the three principles of the deep dialogue method into my interviews and focus groups.

Recall that the three principles or points of definition that I used to explain deep-dialogue demanded that we enter into conversation with an eye on the following: First on ethical systems (where, how and why they diverge and converge), second, on dichotomous thinking (how and why to overcome dualisms) and third, on understandings of the meaning of life (particularly in place). Of course, in my attempts to keep interview atmospheres casual and non-threatening, it is often difficult to open an exchange by going over these ‘ground-rules.’ I find it easier to convey the principles of deep dialogue in the midst of conversation. I usually do so in the context of explaining ‘where I am coming from’ as a researcher and long-time South Jersey native. Hypothetically, then, the dialogue should get ‘deeper’ as we move along in conversation. In truth, this does happen; I often reach a point in an interview or focus group where all whom are involved are keenly aware of a great importance in keeping an open and critical eye on ethical systems, dualisms, and life meanings as we talk. However, such ‘depth’ as I have defined it, varies greatly from meeting to meeting. I find that dialogue happens in whatever ways we (the interviewees and I together) can make it

happen.

One trend that I do notice as I work with the deep dialogue method is that more often than not running a focus groups adds to depth of dialogue. This should not be surprising because in focus groups (with people of differing backgrounds and occupations) there are more voices to be heard. I find that in most of my focus groups people more readily move towards questioning or “deconstructing” what they ‘know’ and ‘think’ about the South Jersey region and how they have come to these understandings. Critical thought and “thinking outside the box” seems to happen eagerly in these group situations. This leads us to bring up issues of ethics, dualistic thinking, and meanings-of-life sooner.

A simple explanation for this trend would be that in these situations there are more ideas “floating around.” Yet, perhaps I find this trend because in group situations it is easier than it is in a one-on-one conversation to surpass an aura of “researcher-with-an-agenda” and move toward an atmosphere of dialogue in which all participants feel that they are equally discussing issues and trying to find common ground. Certainly both of these observations would be supported by some current literature on the focus-group methodology, which seems to agree with the hypothesis that focus groups, more so than individual interviews, create a dialogic space in which taken-for-granted assumptions can be challenged. Such spaces not only allow for the *expression* of (already existing) ideas, but also, as a result of the social dynamics of group dialogue, they often invite the *formation* of new ideas. (For a relevant discussion of focus-group methodology see Pollack 2003 and Eubanks/Abbott 2003). At any rate, applying deep-dialogue in focus group settings certainly seems to indicate that a multiplicity of perspectives joined in eclectic, intellectual, and playful ways, adds to both the breadth and ‘depth’ of dialogue.

I also find that it is easier to reach the fullest breadth and depth of deep dialogue in helping preparations for the January 2005 community forum, “Reconnecting our lives to the land.” This is true not only because there was, during the planning process, a number of perspectives from which to choose and negotiate, but also because the organizers of the

forum had themselves conceived of the event as an exercise in deep dialogue of some sorts. Although they were not expressly alert to the particular three dimensions of deep dialogue that I define, they portrayed the event as a time for examining our human relationship to the land, a time for breaking down barriers in the ways that we think, a time for questioning our agri-cultural trends, and a time for recognizing new rational and social connections. Such a portrayal certainly gets at the heart of the methodology of deep dialogue and these ideas came across even in casual conversations regarding the logistics of event planning. Furthermore, the forum planning process reached towards the ‘depths’ of purposive searching for common ground because its organizers intended it to be a “life-rooted” program. That is, they wanted to design an event that would (in a small, modest way) push people toward life change in both thought and action. The event was meant to offer tools of thought and the beginning stages of network formation so that South Jersey residents could continue to spread agriculture-based dialogue (in their daily lives) for the purpose of transforming and healing all communities – humans, plants, animals, waters and soils – together. In a sense then, the vision for the forum was the very same vision that I indicate in the prologue of this thesis: that ultimately in South Jersey “deep dialogue” and “civic agriculture” merge. South Jersey residents begin to communicate through words, gestures, and rituals, in a way that *lives* the civic potential of agriculture as well as *talks* it.

Thus, in the final two chapters of this thesis I analyze the complex data that I have acquired through conversations guided by the principles of deep dialogue and through participant observation of the forum preparation process. I analyze with the two-tiered research purpose that I have been advancing all along. That is, I analyze as a Burlington County native, to understand what the data is telling South Jersey residents that could be helpful to our future as the “Garden State” and I analyze as an agri-cultural geographer, to understand what the data is telling academics that could be useful as we try to apply dialogue-based cultural research to action in coming years. First, however, I use my interview transcriptions to get at the complex circumstances of Burlington County *now*. To begin my

inquiry regarding the practical implications of agriculture-based dialogue in the region, we must be generally aware of the current state of Burlington County – how the county stands today in regard to issues of landscape, ecology, agriculture, and planning. Of course, to summarize the complexities of any given location is difficult. Burlington County makes summary harder, perhaps, because of the dynamic nature of the area and the sheer diversity of its landscape, demography, and ecology. Therefore, I cannot attempt a fully comprehensive summary of the county. Instead in the following section I provide a brief review of the current situation based upon interviews with a few key county administrators and educators.

Burlington County Now

Having grown up in Burlington County and having completed nearly three years of research on the South Jersey region already, I find that there is always more to learn about our lands, landscapes, townscapes, and farms. This is not surprising given that the county – in which I find so much promise for culture and agriculture – is not a rural backwater but rather a booming center for commercial and housing development as well as a hotspot for a number of different light industries (See appendix 2a and 2b for a municipal map and a locator map of Burlington County). In fact, the urgency of the current situation in terms of South Jersey culture and agriculture is directly compounded by rising land prices all over the county. As a result of all of this booming, growing, raising and swelling, the world of Burlington County is different every day; it is not static. This surplus of energy can be very exciting. One county planner comments, “It is a planners dream to live in a place like Burlington County” (County Clerk 2004, Director of Economic Development 2004).

Burlington County Landscape Planning

To offer a full picture of Burlington County is impossible with words. However, it is possible to sketch a ‘verbal outline’, which can be filled in and re-worked over time.

Planners in the county today describe four identifiable sections, moving from west to east and becoming (with some exceptions in particular municipalities) increasingly less populated. The first is the section of riverfront communities – the “river rats” – along the county’s western border with the Delaware River. These municipalities grew as the early industrial towns and resorts for people in Philadelphia and were also the main shopping centers for the region before the arrival of the malls^c. Moving to the east, the second section is one of newer development and sprawling suburbs. Sometimes called the “M’s” in reference to town names like Moorestown, Mount Laurel, and Medford that are included in this section, here one finds both municipalities that grew (from small towns) as more dense suburban sprawl shortly after World War II, as well as newer, larger, luxury homes, what might be called “McMansion” type development. Third is the section of “fields” or the “farmbelt,” nicknamed perhaps for what it once was more than for what it is becoming. This includes Chesterfield, Mansfield, Springfield – all historically rural areas that have been increasingly taken over by development. Finally, the fourth section we can simply label the Pine Barrens. Although the Pine Barrens of New Jersey extends north, south, and east beyond the county boundaries, the Burlington County section of the Pines includes some of the most ecologically and culturally intriguing parts of the National Preserve (County Clerk 2004, Outreach Coordinator, PC 2004, Director of Economic Development 2004).

It would be premature to suggest where each or any of these four sections are headed in terms of landscape, farmscape, and community planning. However, I can try to give a sense of the multi-faceted approach to town planning that is currently in place in the county in hopes that this can enlighten our discussion of the potential for residents to re-connect with the land-ecology. First, it must be said that the freeholders – the elected officials of county government – over the years have maintained a progressive vision for planning in the county. County planners oversee all ranges of decision-making – broad regional planning down to

^c The “malls,” including the Cherry Hill Mall and Moorestown Mall, refer to the large, drive-to indoor shopping centers now common to South, Central, and Northern New Jersey.

local planning – but the freeholders try to ensure that resolutions and rulings are not made with a “heavy hand.” This is in following with the design that New Jersey is a ‘home rule’ state, meaning that each municipality is in charge of its own jurisdiction. That way, planning is, in at least some ways, accomplished from the “bottom up.” If a decision involves multiple jurisdictions, people come together to talk between municipalities. Planners try to ask for representatives from all communities and work to facilitate the negotiations, raising issues and concerns to test them with the local population.

The current 2004 county freeholders’ office asserts that in recent years there has been a relatively high amount of local interest in participation – perhaps due to proficient publicity of town meetings and coverage of issues related to development and redevelopment. Often this high participation translates to “endless meetings” focusing on analysis of particular area issues. Still, ‘solutions’ emerge and the communities’ concerns are worked into a set of recommendations that may be given to county, state, or regional offices. Along these lines the director of the county's Department of Economic Development and Regional Planning uses a well-known adage to describe his work. He comments that his job really is “to think globally and act locally” because he works to synchronize his county’s municipalities, where form all of these little independent decisions, which impact surrounding communities, the surrounding region, and ultimately the total environment, the natural world that has no bounds (County Clerk 2004, Director of Economic Development 2004).

Anyone who is passionate about issues of land, landscape, and community should feel confident given this description of county planning if we also consider the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment plan, which itself calls for a rather ecological vision of the future complete with a “Smart Growth” model^d. In fact, Burlington County boasts that it is one of the top counties in the very “bottom-up” facilitate-rather-than-dictate type of planning discussed in the postmodern critiques of development that we explored earlier.

^d Smart Growth is a term that describes “well-planned, well managed growth that adds homes and creates jobs, while protecting open space farmland and environmental resources.” It includes walkable neighborhoods and

Indeed, it is this kind of development strategy that would seem to make the ecological and community-oriented visions of New Jersey State Plan work. This may be true especially in the riverfront towns where various kinds of transport-oriented and ecologically sensitive re-development are now taking off. The riverfront is projected to be an “exciting place to live” in the coming decades, with a more “European style” of living – alternatives to driving, town centers that are walkable or bikeable, smaller housing, designs that offer satisfaction, sense of place, and mobility. Still, the reality of the county is far from this Ecocity-Berkley-meets-medieval-Europe dreamscape^c. Today the kinds of development that seem directly opposed to the ecologically and agriculturally sound vision of “Smart Growth” continue to invade the county. Perhaps this is a result of the correct controls not being in the right place.

Yet, I suspect it is more than just a case of ‘mis-control.’ In truth, the sprawling McMansions and mushrooming mega-malls continue to root themselves in Burlington County because the “county” is not sure “it” wants them out. Excluding these kinds of development today means choosing the non-mainstream, the alternative, the option where money is not. The county’s planners find benefit in providing a variety of options for living and working, seemingly whether they meet the criteria of “smart growth” or not. While it may seem laudable that they attempt to preserve a variety of different opportunities and lifestyles – old small town, mature suburbs, emergent suburban development, and farmland – not all of these weigh equally on the scales of ecology and agricultural sustainability. Hence, visions of a landscape that validates the connection between people, agriculture, and ecology, linger as fantasy for some while we continue to live rather disconnected from land and place.

Of course, in many ways Burlington County is to be commended for its achievements in maintaining agriculture’s visibility on the landscape. Its farmland preservation programs have been written up as some of the most successful in the country. Much green space and topsoil has been protected with the “Open Space” initiative while planners use a transfer-of-

^c“distinctive, attractive communities offering a sense of place” and is to be accomplished through planning with much community and stakeholder collaboration (njgov 2004).

development rights program to create little “alternative” small villages in farmland areas that are meant to preserve agricultural history, ecology, and production (County Clerk 2004, Director of Economic Development 2004). Still, farmland and farming as both an occupation and a way-of-life dwindles in Burlington County. It seems that within a certain ‘suburban’ mindset, there is more value placed on saving open space for aesthetic purposes than on saving farmland for cultivation. At least, numerous local farmers, educators, and homeowners have revealed this sentiment to me in both positive and negative lights. One local homeowner states plainly,

We are a residential county. The western side of the county does not know how agriculturally based Burlington County is except for what they know about the Open Space program. They don’t really care about agriculture; their goal is less houses, not keeping the industry of agriculture alive (Food Sciences Academic Program Director 2004).

To be sure, this kind of commentary is plentiful. Some homeowners on the western side of the county are not bothered by the fact of loosing agriculture only by the thought of loosing green space (and the thought of further crowding on the area roads, which would be brought about by new residential development). Although the “Open Space” program was conceived as a way of mingling land-planning issues of importance to both farmers and suburbanites, it has not consistently worked this way. Thus, in part as an offshoot of conflicting values of land planning – the ‘suburban’ mindset versus the ‘agricultural’ mindset – the small-scale farm and farmer as a holder of local wisdom is still in danger of extinction. This is obviously more than just a question of landscape planning and necessitates discussion beyond the language of landscape in regard to our discussion of re-connecting our communal lives to the land.

The state of Burlington County agriculture

If it is difficult to paint a complete picture of the landscape and the landscape

^e Ecocity Berkeley is a reference to the visionary book by Richard Register, *Ecocity Berkeley: Building Cities for a Healthy Future*, North Atlantic Books, 1987.

planning of Burlington County, to present an account of the situation of agriculture in the county is just as demanding. Of course, it would not suffice to offer the numerical facts – the steady decrease of the number of farmers and farm businesses since the 1950’s (Director of Libraries 2004). This would only give support to what we could easily guess and would solidify the feeling that small-scale farming is indeed in peril. Instead, it seems that what might matter more in this kind of investigation is to probe those currently involved in agriculture – to ask local farmers, local farm families, and local farm agents for their assessments of county agriculture. The opinions of these local people are certainly informed by the ‘numbers,’ but they are mediated by their own experiences with and memories of agriculture in Burlington County. Thus, in order to convey the circumstances and conditions wherefrom I begin my dialogic research in Burlington County, I offer the following review of agriculture per the observations of a few local agricultural ‘experts.’

In terms of understanding the current status of agriculture in Burlington County, the first detail to become aware of is the potential for stereotyping (of farmers and the farming industry), which increases when we begin to dialogue about local agriculture with people who are not involved with or experiencing it firsthand. In Burlington County, as elsewhere, common assumptions about farmers and the farming industry include the perception that farmers are uneducated, the perception that farmers lives are more leisurely because they “work” only during the summer, and the perception that, because food prices have continued to rise in recent years, farmers have seen an equal increase in profits. Also common are farmer-homeowner conflicts regarding the ways in which farm operations effect surrounding townships. Sound, smells, and waters from irrigation can not always be contained within farm boundaries. As a result, homeowners and agriculturists may find themselves at odds with each other. It is for this reason that all over the United States “right to farm” acts had to be put into place. Indeed, such conflicts happen in many agricultural areas, but in Burlington County especially, the intense mingling of sub-urban and rural ways-of-life seems to lead to these tensions. This sort of misunderstanding between farmers and people outside the

farming community is important to this research because it can lead to an inability or unwillingness to conceive of agriculture in new (holistic) ways.

Of course there is another issue surrounding South Jersey resident's relative intellectual/emotional misunderstanding of agriculture that is much more complexly entangled with modern ways of life than is a simple aversion to farm smells and sounds held by those not accustomed to a farm environment. This issue is one that I have brought up before: the matter of valuing the 'local' (particularly the local small-scale farm). In *South Jersey under the Stars*, I point out that agriculturally-supportive community activities and farm market visits are quite common in Burlington County. The Burlington County agricultural agent agrees, commenting that, "People in [wealthier towns like] Moorestown will pay more money for local produce." Local produce is certainly something that many Burlington County residents value for a seeming variety of reasons. In dialogue with area residents, then, it will be important to interrogate the reasons, beliefs, and justifications behind these valuations of local produce. It may also be important to consider why it might be that, as the county agricultural agent says, people in 'wealthier towns' seem to give localness a high priority. Getting to the root of such issues seems the only way to bring local residents to a fuller understanding of the "wholeness" of agriculture, and its relevance to their lives.

Along similar lines, it might also be important to consider an opposing sort of trend that has also been noted in South Jersey today. The county agricultural agent comments that although there is indeed an interest in local produce and local agriculture, over the years he has gotten less of a sense of this value. "There used to be a stronger commitment to local farming," he remarks. He attributes this to "corporations and the corporate mindset" where, he says, "the bottom line is having the cheapest produce." He goes on to explain that, "Today in Burlington County people will see that 'Produce Junction' sells produce for a cheaper price and will go there, despite the fact that it is not local." To the extent that the county agricultural agent's assessment of food purchasing is true, it seems that a 'corporate consumer' mindset, or perhaps more accurately, an 'industrial' mindset is weakening

commitment to local farming in Burlington County (Burlington County Agricultural Agent 2004). We must also make sure to interrogate this claim in dialogue in South Jersey. The Burlington County agricultural agent's commentary would suggest that as a result of the influence of a certain 'insensitive' mindset, and thus a weakened commitment to local farming, local residents have begun to think and act in ways that do not speak to the wholeness of agriculture. That is, they seem to have lost sight of the fact that everyone, in eating and dwelling on the earth, is a participant in agriculture and therefore influences and is inherently connected to the cycles of land and landscape. Is this true, and if so, in what ways? Our dialogue in South Jersey must engage directly with this kind of suggestion as well.

Finally, in our dialogue in South Jersey we may also have to discuss the fact that this sort of weakened commitment to local farming has not only surfaced outside the farming community. Undoubtedly the economic instability of life as a farmer as well as the widened range of potential occupations in today's corporate and academic worlds have a marked influence on farmers' own senses of identity and loyalty to the line of work. Many farmers in South Jersey have expressed a negative self-image of what they do (Burlington County Agricultural Agent 2004). A common sentiment among farm families is that children should follow 'mainstream' paths to 'success.' Many farm parents will discourage their children from entering farming. (On the other hand, the majority of farm parents are glad when children decide to enter farming on their own free will). In addition, farmers often harp on the difficulty of the occupation. The county agricultural agent has repeatedly heard 'threats' to quit farmwork from the agriculturists with whom he works. However these threats are rarely followed through. He recounts an anecdote of a man who had been in farming for thirty-four years in Burlington County; this man 'quit' farming thirty-three of those years.

The reason that many agriculturists give for their continued commitment to farming is their personal or familial dedication to land stewardship. For many of those who continue to farm in Burlington County, passions for stewardship help override farming's many struggles (Burlington County Agricultural Agent 2004). One Biology professor and ex-

cranberry farmer explains that the non-farming community does not realize just how much farmers do regard themselves as stewards of the land, particularly if the land has been in the family for generations. He comments on a handful of long-standing farming families in the county: “ The Lee family, the Cuts family, the Haines family,” he remarks, “they have been doing this for generations and quite frankly, money is not the only factor” (Professor of Biology 2004).

Money, indeed is not the only factor when it comes to exploring, describing, and understanding the current state of agriculture in Burlington County. Clearly, this brief examination of farming in Burlington County demonstrates that agriculture here is at once tenuous and rewarding, at once draining and inspiring. Economic instability is certainly an issue that affects the farm experience on many levels – physical, psychological, intellectual, even perhaps spiritual. Yet, there is something powerful about the experience of farming in Burlington County that keeps people coming back to it. Farmers may struggle with a poor self-image of what they do, but they also find working with the land incredibly meaningful. At times, the non-farming community seems equally ambivalent about local agriculture. Some revere it and support it; some dislike it and care not for its future. Many waver, on one hand advocating for support of farm markets and more interaction with local agriculturists and, on the other, making full use of the ease, variety, and low prices that the conventional, globalized food system allows.

Conclusions

Even though the future of farming in South Jersey is contested, the above descriptions of Burlington County reveal that it is an area ripe for agriculturally founded cultural transformation. Specifically, the currently high level of participation in municipal and local planning that county administrators note would clearly be an advantage to community-level change. More broadly, the current energy surrounding issues of landscape

change and farmland preservation make Burlington County a prime spot to begin a trial in a new pedagogical approach to ‘development’ and eco-social change – a new way of thinking about people, land, and community that is rooted in agriculture. Of course, by ‘rooted in agriculture’ I do not mean to suggest that all residents of Burlington County are ready to move now to become agriculturists themselves. Being rooted in agriculture would not entail the re-creation of a rural society, but would portend a reconsideration of both our common valuation of land and farm in Burlington County and our social positioning in relation to all aspects of agricultural experience.

Furthermore, the site of Burlington County seems logical as a case-study site for a trial in dialogue-based cultural research because, one might argue, the county is remarkably representative of “everywhere.” Burlington County is a place of great diversity in regard to its lands, landscapes, and communities. It is a place of both transience and tradition, of both excited newcomers and nostalgic old-timers. It is at once rural and urban, at once rustic and metropolitan. In spots it is one of the most heavily populated places in the country, in others it remains one of the most desolate. In Burlington County, as a result of this diversity, there is much difficulty in defining an “our” or a “we.” To talk of reconnecting “our communal” lives to the land in such a place requires that one does not make assumptions about residents’ visions of and feelings for the county. Some of my respondents will already have strong opinions about the relationship of agriculture to both local ecology and local society. Others may hardly consider such matters as critical to their own lives. Still, in this portion of the “Garden State,” with its field crops and fast-food chains side-by-side, we might expect, at least, an engaging exchange of ideas to emerge from this sort of research.

And, to be sure, the extent to which my respondents already value local agriculture matters not to the validity of the study. Openly, this thesis is not focused on whether local populations should support local agriculture for the sake of local farmers. Instead the focus is on whether it is possible to create a dialogue on agriculture that encourages South Jersey residents to come together as a community. The purpose of such a dialogue would be first, to

engender a renewed attentiveness to one's sense of belonging in South Jersey and second, to stimulate awareness of eco-social concerns that are effecting the local area. I use 'agriculture' as a structure for dialogue most simply because I find it to contain multiple ways to introduce a holistic attentiveness to people, land and community. Certainly, Chapter Two of this thesis offered many agriculturally based theories that provide ways to explain how our current ways-of-life in South Jersey might be ecologically and socially detrimental. My next step requires reaching out with these ideas in dialogue. The coming chapter analyzes a dialogue I have begun in South Jersey in which I explore how various ways of thinking provided by agricultural geography might help to create a more ecologically and socially *conscious* and more ecologically and socially *active* local citizenry.

CHAPTER FOUR: Dialogue in Burlington County

“ . . . agriculture is in so complex a sense a cultural endeavor.”
(Wendell Berry, 1977, *The Unsettling of America*, p87)

Introduction

The intention behind the very modest dialogue that I establish in Burlington County is the creation of a more ecologically and socially *conscious* and more ecologically and socially *active* local citizenry. Although I do not expect notable change to emerge from this thesis alone, I work with local Burlington County ‘educators’ to come up with an agriculturally-founded vision for transforming ‘ethos’ in South Jersey. I mean this in the very root sense of *ethos*: Ethos originally, when written with an epsilon meant “habits,” and written with an eta meant “place of birth” or habitual “residence.” At its origins then, the term ‘ethos’ kept ‘people’ with ‘place’ (Ethos 2004). Changing ethos entails changing the habits of how we live, the habits of how we feel, and our habitual residence too – how Burlington County looks and functions. In this way it is simultaneously about a revolution in consciousness and a renovation of the concrete features and affairs of the local region. Such a transformation would allow South Jersey to reinforce its cultural attentiveness to place and to “wholeness” -- the inherent union of people, land, and community.

With the idea of transformation in mind I have long sought to come together with other South Jersey residents to use the wholeness found in agriculture as a framework for critical holistic questioning about our local homeplace: Are we, as a resident population, inattentive to local ecology, local community -- the *local* in general? Are we becoming more so, and if we are, why might this be a problem? In order to find *practical* responses to such questions I have begun to ask county ‘educators’ (of all kinds) to look at how people create meaning for their lives-in-place in Burlington County and examine with me whether agriculture is central to this discussion. In the same breath, I also have posed whether a holistic vision of agriculture could become even more central to our ways of life in Burlington County. I ask our county teachers: Does this seem like a good idea, an important idea? What would this new centrality of agriculture mean and how is it to be accomplished? In dialogue I ask, How is it that we might visualize reconnecting our lives to the land and to each other in that way?

Of course, while explaining these questions in what I have characterized as a ‘new’ dialogue for South Jersey, I do not mean to suggest that there are no already existing forms of

community dialogue, or systems of discourse and meaning-making in Burlington County that are relevant to the topics that I advance during my research process. Certainly my approach to research here is not meant to be ahistorical. On the contrary, I recognize that there are (and have been for decades) ‘seeds’ of the kind of dialogue I desire already in action across all of South Jersey. In addition there I could identify many other pre-existing ‘initiatives’ and land-related discussions or disputes that are important to recognize. A small number of these I alluded to in the final section of Chapter Three, but there are surely too many to cover in such a brief account of today’s South Jersey. Other issues and initiatives I have discussed in detail in the precursory work to this thesis research, the book *South Jersey under the Stars*. Yet, here too there are inevitable gaps. Furthermore, not all of these pertinent ‘seeds’ of dialogue can be uncovered during the finite dialogic research process of this thesis. My research questions will still leave much from within South Jersey’s past and present untouched. It is for this reason that I emphasize this work as just a *modest* dialogue; it is simply a beginning, and a beginning that, in some ways, had already begun.

In the coming chapter I offer a detailed and analytical depiction of my dialogic research in Burlington County. The first section studies the use of a six-question flyer on the topic of ‘civic agriculture’ searching for patterns in the initial reactions of educators to the flyer’s lines of questioning and considering what these patterns reveal about my respondents’ visions for South Jersey’s future. Specifically, I examine what the evident patterns seem to say about the readiness of the identified educational leadership to guide and mediate transformation of ethos in Burlington County. The second section offers a different sort of in-depth account of agricultural dialogue in action, paying attention to the ability of dialogue to open spaces of ‘common ground’ among potentially divergent groups. This section provides testimony for the fact that a focus on agriculture can allow individuals and communities greater analytical understandings of the meanings and emotions they attach to ‘place’ and life in ‘place.’ Finally, the chapter ends with a presentation of an introductory vision for South Jersey, woven from the declarations of county educators. The expression of the vision is accompanied by an account of the strategies for action that emerge during the visioning process. To clarify an earlier point again here, the discussion of my empirical

research throughout this chapter does not involve any “measurement” so to speak. That is, I do not attempt to prove any certain extent to transformation or rate of success for dialogue. Instead I answer my research questions through thick description and cautious evaluation of what might be described as the “active ethnography” of this thesis work.

Questioning Civic Agriculture

As I have just made clear, I do not pretend to enter into this research completely unbiased. Clearly, I do have an agenda. On a most basic level this agenda can be explained along the lines of a ‘planning’ strategy; if I am to consider my efforts in South Jersey as acts of a community planner, then I have to begin work with a malleable yet operational proposal in mind. My intention for South Jersey is to initiate a new kind of development in South Jersey – a *transformation*, a movement in a different direction in regard to the overall way people think, society functions, and land figures on the horizon. The direction I want to move is one of wholeness, one in which humans’ *relationality* to other people, animals, plants, and objects is stressed more actively, one in which *caring* for surrounding people, land, and community becomes even more possible. As an agricultural geographer and systems thinker I consider this kind of eco-social reality most necessary if we are to ever endeavor to meet the imperatives of “sustainability” in the region.

This ‘planning’ work requires the help of others in South Jersey if it is to be of any merit. The emerging dialogue needs potential leaders in the county who are interested in negotiating the complexities of transformation together. Hence, I have previously identified thirty county leaders or ‘educators’ on whom I have focused my primary interview research. Now, in the coming pages I work to assess these thirty in terms of the group’s overall readiness or willingness to join a push for transformation. Or, more accurately, I assess my (group and individual) interviews with these educators as routes to the initiation of a community-wide dialogue. I question what works and what doesn’t, what inspires and what leaves people cold, and what seems to be necessary to a discussion of “wholeness” in our area of South Jersey.

Of course, my emphasis on agriculture adds another layer of intricacy to my empirical research. I have chosen dialogue on agriculture as a strategy for “development.” I have done this because I sense that a focus on agriculture can be a gateway to wholeness, and to systems thinking. Yet, in order for what I mean by wholeness to be pragmatic, it must be understood. Thus, I search for the readiness of the identified group of educators to be open to a holistic conception of agriculture. This means that individuals must display an openness to thinking about agriculture as an complex system, to seeing connections up and down the food chain, to searching for economic, political, ecological, and indeed cultural implications, and finally, to recognizing a certain validity in the notion that agriculture is central to the lives of all urban, suburban, and rural residents. To clarify, being open does *not* mean that an individual must consider agriculture as an emotionally meaningful or personally treasured part of life. In short, being open to a holistic view of agriculture simply implies that one is ready to engage in questioning, reflecting, and connecting -- in *critical* thinking, *reflexive* thinking, and *systems* thinking. Agriculture becomes as much about the wholeness of people, land, and community as it is about the specific, intricate acts of cultivating the earth.

Along these lines, for the initial interview process I created a “Civic Agriculture” flyer as a guideline for discussion (see appendix 4a for a copy of the flyer). The civic agriculture questions were meant to invoke a holistic vision of agriculture as they engaged respondents in opinion-based conversation. To analyze readiness from these conversations, I have paid particular attention to initial reactions and to the variety of manners in which educators respond to the lines of questioning that the flyer has laid out. I examine how people have understood each question and whether or not it has evoked a response of care or concern and I observe how often a question prompts a search for remedy. For each question individually, as well as for the series of questions as a whole, I monitor whether such lines of inquiry seem to communicate a need for critical, systemic thinking about our local homeplace of Burlington County.

The following passages are a sampling and summation of the initial responses that I receive from the previously identified group of thirty ‘educational leaders’ (formal, non-formal, and related administration) on the civic agriculture questions during individual

interviews. The group is equally split between women and men. Most are middle-aged, in their 40s and 50s, with a few younger (30s) and a few older (60s). In the group there are twelve formal educators (professors), ten non-formal educators (outreach coordinators, festival organizers, etc.), four educational administrators (relating to formal public education), and four county administrators (relating to non-formal public education). In the coming pages I refer to approximations in regard to this group, such as “most,” “the majority,” or “a few.” While I do not think it necessary nor prudent to quantify the responses of the group, it may be helpful to know the proportions that are suggested in these approximations: “most” would refer to a proportion of over three-fourths of the group, “the majority” would suggest somewhere around two-thirds (and definitely over one half of the group), and “a few” usually means only three or four respondents, or at least in total no more than one-fourth of the group. Each of the below sections identifies one of six lines of questioning I present in the “Civic Agriculture” flyer.

Place-based perceptual ecology

To begin my inquiry, I borrow a simple yet useful concept of “place-based perceptual ecology” from environmental educator Mitchell Thomashow (Thomashow 2002). The concept refers to a person’s relative ability to notice, comprehend, and identify with the complexities of surrounding human and eco-systems. Along these lines I question, how attentive are we to the natural world and agricultural cycles in Burlington County? The first reactions of respondents to this line of questioning are diverse. A few are already satisfied with Burlington County’s level of attentiveness to land, ecology, and agriculture, and therefore see no urgency in rethinking local connectedness with the land:

“We, myself included, are aware of the importance of land, of agriculture, of farming, in our communities. We are buying up farmland in the county so that farms do not become developments. But I don’t think the average person wants to do farming. Most people don’t have that love of the soil. We aren’t going to go back to the way things were in the county nor do I think people want that in their lives.”

This kind of response is perhaps most common with those who work in county government and who like to see their work as already quite progressive. A deep shift in ways of thinking about local development seems rather unnecessary. Most other respondents consider

attentiveness to land, ecology, and agriculture to be an ever-present issue of concern, and are wary yet hopeful that attentiveness can be increased:

“In our daily lives, most people are not attentive enough. Still, engrained in many parents in Burlington County is the sense of letting their children become aware [of agriculture/ecology/nature] and become involved with it.”

“Those that interact with the land or ecology for whatever reason in Burlington County begin to identify more with the land and what’s going on and actually want to take care of it or are more inclined to take care of it. But, [probably] only one percent of us, such a small percentage, actually live off the land now. Its very difficult to get the necessary interaction, people get removed, how do they get back?”

“Everyone is so technology driven. We always want the biggest SUV's. Bigger developments come in every day. We don't remember that our society is based in agriculture. We don't remember that without our agricultural base we aren't anything.”

However, a notable few express a decided indifference to the query, explaining that attentiveness is just not a part of what is important to life in South Jersey today:

“To be honest, the public has no clue about farming and people do not give a damn. The majority of the public will not think about ecology until it slaps them in the face. If you want to make them care, you have to connect it to something they want. What’s in it for them?”

Such commentary indicates that the idea of a “place-based perceptual ecology” is getting a mixed response. Still, taking responses as a whole, the majority of educators do sense that attentiveness to human and natural systems, including agriculture, is deficient in the county, and many take the step to wonder what sorts of collective action could really make a difference in strengthening our perceptual ecologies.

Seasonal rounds

My next line of questioning is related to the first, but is more pointed, having to do with the seasonal rounds, both agricultural and “natural” that are apparent in this portion of the Mid-Atlantic. In South Jersey the landscape changes vividly and productively from summer to fall, winter to spring. I question my respondents, what does this have to do with our identities and the way we think? This query is understood quite differently by those who have been active in the farming community and those who have not. Those with experience in agriculture offer detailed explanations of how passions are set and ways of thinking are

structured by the seasonal round:

“Farmers are much more in touch with the seasons and the land. In the springtime or after a rain, they cannot wait to get out there again. This connection is what makes them forget about hardships.”

“I was a cranberry farmer in Chatsworth. [Growing] is either cranberries or blueberries there, and everybody in that community is on that cycle. You live your life according to the crop. It dictates to you what you are going to be doing every day and every season, and although there are differences each year, there is a certain seasonality to the work. You end up doing the same kinds of things every season. Also, Chatsworth is so little and so much of the economy has to do with the berry crop. There is very little there beyond cranberry or blueberries . . .The town sets its seasonal watches by the crop.”

Other respondents see a connection between season and identity on a much smaller scale.

Many of those not active in the farming community see connecting to the seasons as a luxury, but still like it:

“I see a lot of people in Burlington County, though they are not directly participating in agriculture, growing their own tomatoes and squash, becoming more in touch with the seasons of the land through their own gardens.”

“Seasonality is a really good way to ‘bring home’ ideas about ecology as they relate to the local land, make people see how ecology is present in their lives. I always encourage students to do things related to witnessing the seasons – go see leaves, pick pumpkins. I stress that in small ways.”

“In Burlington County we are more attentive to the natural cycles only if for the reason that the family owned farms and farm markets create a seasonality in the county that others don't have. I know many people who buy all of their produce at the farm markets and in the fall they'll buy cornstalks and gourds for seasonal decoration from the markets.”

“At one level in the county we are aware of changing seasons but we don't attend to them the way we might have at one time.”

Again, in initial response to this query on seasons, a noted few express a skepticism and clear indifference in regard to modern society's capacity to connect to the seasonal round of local agro-ecosystems. Such respondents do not view seasonal attentiveness as necessarily desirable and would not consider it an obligation of the general populace:

“People don't have the time or education to begin to think about interconnectedness and seasonality in this way. Maybe if you turn the seasonal cycles of the farm into some sort of entertainment, some amusement, then people might respond.”

Clearly, the issue of seasonality, like the idea of the “place based perceptual ecology” does

not inspire everyone. However, considering the response of the group as a whole, my respondents find the seasons to be an effective way to locate attentiveness precisely because everyone *must* be aware of seasonal change on some level. Furthermore, in Burlington County many educators do tend to conflate seasonal change with phases in the agricultural calendar.

Agriculture across the curriculum

Taking lead from the educational idea of ‘literature across the curriculum’ in which literature is connected in various ways to all subjects taught in the classroom, I wonder whether ‘teaching’ or ‘education’ in Burlington County might be able to offer a similar kind of holistic treatment of agriculture. I question, What might the county’s seasonal agricultural rounds have to do with what we teach in our schools and in our outreach programs? The most common response I get from this query is one that involves recollection of grade school field trips to farms. This kind of remembrance is significant, at least, in the nostalgia for an innocent connectedness to the land it unveils. One farmer explains his delight in witnessing young students connect to the land:

“When I was a cranberry farmer I always allowed the local school to bring the local school children in. They would come in and I used to give them a tour of the harvest and get them down into the bog to see how the fruit grows. I would have them try a fresh cranberry, a raw cranberry, which is sour, of course, and they’d all pucker up and make faces. But I always thought that was part of their heritage in being here . . . part of their civic pride and sense of belonging to the community.”

When relating this query to ideas of non-formal education, ‘educators’ in places of environmental or historical outreach like the Pinelands Preservation Alliance and Whitesbog Preservation Trust reveal a hesitancy to allow agriculture a central (defining) role. Calling holistic attention to agriculture is not central to their mission. Of course, those involved with the Burlington County Farm Fair have much to say about education and the centrality of agriculture to everyone’s lives. Still, the initial reaction of the Farm Fair affiliates demonstrates a rather narrow view of agriculture as an important educational tool:

“The [Burlington County] farm fair sets up ‘farmer for a day’ as education in agriculture. They have a small area set up . . . where children can go and dig for potatoes and pick up eggs and milk a plywood cow. They have boxes of soybeans,

wheat, and rye to explain to parents the different agricultural products being grown in the county.”

Such a response does not mean that the farm fair affiliates are unaware of a broader conception of agriculture, one that embraces the union of people, land, and community. However, it would seem to imply that they have not yet seen a connection between agriculture and critical pedagogy or cultural reflection.

On first response many formal educators demonstrate a similarly narrow view of agriculture as an educational tool. Still, the majority of respondents in formal educational settings seem to make at least nominal room for agriculture quite easily. At least, a great number of them take interest in this line of questioning, searching to make a connection to their lives as educators.

“To be honest, at first I wondered what agriculture has to do with what I teach. I would have thought perhaps to speak with biology or ecology professors. Then I thought perhaps a connection could be found in literature – in themes and settings.”

“Science is the most obvious place to do all of this, particularly biology, where they teach the basic concepts of ecology and geology. [Here] cycles, cycling, and systems-thinking are important. But, literature could be a place too.”

“In economics most of the examples of supply and demand are agriculturally based. Food examples I use a lot because farmers are their own worst enemy: farmers grow all the same crop, the prices go down, and there is no money.”

“In philosophy I thought a connection could be found in ethics, especially environmental ethics.”

“In my psychology of education classes, one smaller example I have done that might be relevant is simply asking students to take a walk through their neighborhood and look at how much asphalt there is and how much undeveloped land they see. How much is natural and how much is agricultural. Also, I ask them to look at it after a rainstorm and see how it is different.”

Still, only a few recognize a holistic treatment of agriculture in the classroom as a way to encourage students to expand their ways of thinking about the world:

“It may be a weird metaphor but I see the science classes I teach as abstract art: either students get it or they don't. I could explain [how agriculture is central to all of our lives] and some would just say, ‘Yeah, so what?’ Some don't THINK about it. But some would make an effort to really understand agriculture and the agricultural seasons and how it relates to us as a people.”

“Art would be important in this sense of agriculture across the curriculum because art helps you to see. You start seeing things you had not seen before.”

In addition, many formal educators express a concern that Burlington County students would not be interested in how a given subject relates to agriculture, food, or farm. A holistic appreciation of agriculture would be lost on them:

“If you asked, ‘How would your students respond [to agriculture across the curriculum],’ I would say first of all, they need to be informed. There would be no response.”

“In terms of students, so few of the population is in farming today; for most the land is irrelevant. Ninety-eight percent of our students have nothing to do with agriculture.”

Yet, at least one professor expresses a sense of resolve that whether in formal or non-formal settings, so-called ‘agriculture across the curriculum’ is vital for the future of Burlington County:

“What would agriculture across the curriculum have to do with *learning* in the county in general? Everyone in the county has to be involved in thinking about this kind of thing and talking with others. Everyone has to see this and to begin to see a different perspective – like the builders who are building the houses, the developers. Absolutely they have to be included, they have to be able to explain their perspective too. I look at Monmouth County (New Jersey), which was very agricultural and now most of the county is suburbs. Those were some of the best agricultural soils in the world and they lost them. You could grow anything there, and they did, they grew the produce that was, you know, the ‘garden state.’ But its all . . . all of its gone. That’s happening here too. People have to be made aware.”

On a whole, then, Burlington County educators react industriously to the idea of “agriculture across the curriculum.” That is, although many have not yet seen a connection between agriculture and critical pedagogy or cultural reflection, a great majority take interest in discovering how their areas of expertise might fit with agriculture. Furthermore, in at least a few cases the focus on agriculture across the curriculum does seem to invite respondents to think holistically (or at least ‘outside the boxes’ of usual disciplinary contemplation).

Eating as an agricultural act

The idea that “eating is an agricultural act” I borrow from farmer and author Wendell Berry. Berry sees the need to cultivate food as humanity’s link to the natural world, and explains that eating completes the cycle. I ask South Jersey educators, how aware are we of these linkages? The majority of initial responses to this line of questioning establish a strong

consensus that South Jersey is culturally inattentive to the linkage to the natural world that food provides:

“Today people don’t even know the names of common vegetables, and they do not care. But, if I have not heard of the newest computer gadget, people are shocked. This exemplifies our disconnect to the land and to what is grown on the land. And it really is crazy because, what do we need to survive? Food!”

“How do you educate a culture as to the significance of agriculture? This is so important and yet we are so disconnected to the food we eat.”

“I know that many of my students don’t think about where food is grown.”

“Today kids don’t even know where milk comes from. I think it’s a very good idea that people get exposed to agriculture and to see some of the problems in agriculture.”

However, the exposure of this inattentiveness does not prompt concern in all cases. Some either do not connect food choices with significant ecological and social ramifications or see their food options as so controlled by a larger economic system that caring is irrelevant.

“When people grab that box of cereal in the supermarket, I don’t think they think of the farm in Indiana or Ohio where it probably came from. People don’t have time to think, ‘Oh this is [Farmer X’s] farm,’ they think ‘this is food, it’s fresh, it’s right here.’ The supermarkets and Wal-Marts . . . bring food at substantially lower prices and people react to that. That’s the way it is.”

“Kids and students don’t know that connection; they connect everything with the grocery store. They don’t see agriculture. Am I personally distressed about this? Should I be?”

Beyond these few, many others, unmistakably, are concerned and they search for ways to reverse the trends of inattentiveness that all respondents have recognized. In some cases, the only ways of reversal that respondents have come up with have to do with how one eats; individuals can respond by trying to eat locally and seasonally in whatever ways they can.

“I won’t eat tomatoes or corn unless it’s in season here. The same with seasonal fruit.”

“I buy all my produce at the local farm stands in the months when they are open.”

“We have a good shot at [realizing eating is an agricultural act] here in Burlington County because we are proud of our fruits and vegetables for whatever reason. We can use that to create an awareness of seasonal eating . . . People can bond on that pride and awareness with others. We can capitalize on those bonding issues.”

We will come back to this idea of ‘capitalizing’ on locally-linked emotions such as pride, nostalgia, and affection. What is important to see here is the opening up of analytical space

that the idea of “eating as an agricultural act” promotes. Given such initial commentary I find that, on a whole, this line of questioning becomes important to educators finding their own ways into holistic thinking. Through adding the element of food and eating to the mix of agricultural dialogue, respondents begin to consider *agri-culture* as something much broader and far-reaching than the simple growing of crops.

Localism through food and farm

In this penultimate query I reach closer to issues of cultural transformation. I search to know what educators think of the potential effect of the whole agricultural experience – the seasonal change on the landscape, the actual act of cultivation, the acts of purchasing and eating, all combined. Can cultural attention to food and farm deepen our affection for the ecological and social intricacies of the ‘place’ in which we dwell? Interestingly, in reaction to this line of questioning, all respondents recognize that increasing affection for and attentiveness to place is at least a valid objective if not an imperative for the future of the county. County planners and administrators offer a most optimistic response – perhaps overly optimistic; most of those respondents who are involved in local planning in some way or another seem to think that such ‘localism through food and farm’ is already well underway in the county:

“Enlivening a sense of place and stewardship through agriculture? This is already happening in Burlington County. There is so much support from residents for farmland preservation programs. There is a sense of understanding by the public about efforts of preservation. It has been really productive. Voters approved farmland preservation and such issues are always a part of elections and policy.”

Still, only those who have had substantial interaction with the farming community are able to speak directly to the ability of agriculture to effect change in someone on an individual or emotional level – the level of affection or sense of belonging:

“[As a farmer] do you get an affection for the land? Absolutely, on my [cranberry farm] we named our bogs. Ocean spray called them A-1, B-2, some sort of letter and number designation that they had but we had names for them. We called our bogs, well, there was Earl’s Bog and Fourteen-Acre Bog and there was Little Italy, and the Island Bog. They all had different names and the pump houses had different names. And other parts of the farm too. The names change as the generations change, but that’s how you come to identify with things. When I had to leave the farm, I didn’t mind leaving the house I lived in but I certainly missed [the land]. . . Every morning,

every single morning . . . the first thing I did was drive completely around the cranberry bogs and look at every single bog on the farm. I would do that on Thanksgiving or Christmas Day . . . after we opened our presents I'd go out to the bogs . . . every morning, really, and I would look forward to it. I would wake up in the morning and really look forward to getting out there. It was very hard to leave."

"After years in an agricultural family, do I have a love of place? Definitely, I couldn't live anywhere else. I lived in Illinois for ten years, but it wasn't home. This [Burlington County] is home."

Most of those with less direct experience in agriculture and no direct experience in county planning respond that an increase in cultural awareness of agriculture – of food and farm – may have the potential to affect sense of place or belonging, but that they have never given it much thought, especially on the level of the collective or of wider society. In all cases, respondents seem wary as to whether agriculture could ever be culturally significant enough to substantially affect those outside the farming community. Without complete reversal to a rural society many are skeptical that local farms could be understood as important *cultural* institutions and thus sense that agriculture is to remain marginal to many local residents' senses of place or sentiments of affection/belonging:

"People don't think of the farm and food as connected to their lives here, and you're not really going to get them there. You will not get them to [appreciate] the traditions and all the rest of it. We don't raise somebody's barn anymore. There are lots of things we don't do and can't do. The population is not x number of farmers living a few miles from each other, who always get together to help each other out because they know when they need some help, they'll get it. We still do these [caring] things for each other but we do it through the typical charity or we drop off some money at the bells at Christmas, that sort of thing."

"You will never change people's minds. There is always going to be a mixture of people here, some wanting to live in the big suburban developments. Some are not interested in agriculture."

Clearly, the proposal of localism through food and farm is quite contested. Despite the broadening of the analytical space in which my respondents consider these questions, and despite vocalized eco-social concerns, some are not ready to see the idea of holistic attentiveness to agri-*culture* as generic enough or potentially ordinary enough to merit a less-than epic status. I press further on this issue in my closing query.

Cultural reflection (as it relates to the above)

This final line of inquiry is most pointedly directed to determine what educators think

of the idea and significance of cultural reflection for the context of South Jersey and our issues of land and landscape. I ask, how might our identities (as citizens of the ‘Garden State’?) be transformed by answering the above questions together? What might make transformation difficult? As a whole, the reactions of the respondents to the question of cultural reflection reveal that the single most difficult obstacle to ‘transformational learning’ in Burlington County could be that many potential leaders have not thought of themselves as “planters of ideas.” At least half of the potential leaders I have singled out remark that they have not given substantial thought as to how education-based cultural reflection could relate to life in Burlington County. Still, most educators are willing to contemplate its relevance and its potential in dialogue with me. They offer numerous ideas regarding the limitations of cultural reflection for ‘civic agriculture’ that they see both as educators and as local citizens. In formal education limits are readily found in the standards of curriculum and assessment:

“In terms of cultural reflection in formal education, we would have to be talking about the benefits of a course outside the framework of assessment. The bottom line when you are teaching is assessment, that students produce an assignment and professors produce a grade. This might make it hard to push for self reflection that transforms identity. . . The biggest challenge with this kind of educational idea is to produce critical thinkers. A lot of students will come to class just wanting to know what they have to do to get the ‘A’.”

“While this kind of [culturally reflective] dialogue in class is good, sometimes students just have to listen and not ask questions. There is a core amount of information a teacher has to provide. The way things are, cultural reflection cannot take a top priority realistically speaking.”

Other educators, both formal and non-formal offer personal limits; they are uncomfortable with the very idea of teaching as transformational:

“Getting students to reflect on culture with the idea that I might change their minds is not something that I am supposed to be doing as a teacher. Sometimes I discuss ecological issues, but I don’t see it as my place to push any mindset. I think of it as propaganda.”

“Connecting to the land is a fairly good idea, but I see it as one of many cultural agendas that might be important. It is not my job to endorse any one in particular.”

“These questions for civic agriculture are too specific. The seasonal idea and the other ideas are general ways for people to connect to the land, but people do not think of it [so reflexively]. People go to the blueberry and cranberry festivals during the harvesting seasons; in the past this was about celebrating agriculture and taking in the

harvest. Now it is a day out, it's more about getting out.”

Many others have no problem with initiating cultural change on the local level and, in fact, would like to demand it, but they offer critiques of current social norms and attitudes as a way to articulate why it is that they feel rather ineffective as individuals in helping transformation:

“Part of the problem with raising the kind of consciousness you are talking about in these civic agriculture questions is the general American attitude towards life, their standpoint on life. People want their SUV's, their mansions, they hold on to their materialism . . . Individual freedom is given such a wide berth in the United States.”

“It's really a challenge to get something like this going here because there are a lot of people living here who do not like it and who do not plan to be here permanently.”

“I think the best or only way to begin this kind of cultural reflection is by opening up a dialogue and getting people thinking about it, like you are doing right now. I mean, some already do think about these topics – ethically or otherwise – but many others do not. Of course, it's hard to trace the results of an individual dialogue.”

“ What do I think of cultural reflection to stimulate cultural change – a change in cosmology or in world view, a change to re-connect deeply with the land? I think this is a wonderful idea. It certainly wouldn't hurt, but I fear that it may affect only a very small percentage of people. Still, anything would be an important step in the right direction. People are so disconnected.”

Finally, at least one respondent expresses how he finds inspiration with the idea of cultural reflection as a means of transforming the local citizenry:

“I see this kind of cultural reflection as a way to fight the homogenization of our society, culture, and landscape everywhere, like [nature writer] Aldo Leopold writes. He was embedded in that place (Sand County), but yet his ideas were of global importance. This is a theme I stress with everyone I talk to: local attachment can be global. That kind of relationship to the land can be transplanted elsewhere. People don't come with a trained sense of place from childhood anymore because [commitment to place] doesn't exist anymore. But, a sense of *connection* doesn't mean that you get tied down, you can do it wherever you live.”

The final comment may be particularly important to the practicality of using dialogue on agriculture to spur wholeness and systemic thinking in South Jersey. Indeed, the concept of wholeness in agriculture that I encourage as an entryway or framework for attentiveness to the union of people, land, and community, need not be fixed to the local setting. Agriculture, at once a natural and human system, has universal cultural linkages that are so commonly mis-regarded and misrepresented. *Agri-culture* in Burlington County and everywhere, as I discuss it, is not about the static, the rural, and the provincial. Along these lines, “connecting

with the land,” as part of the people, land community union, is not simply some dream for a simplified, limited, pastoral existence. Agriculture grasps strongly at the urban and leads inevitably to the global, yet this broader view of agriculture is clearly difficult to impart. Many Burlington County educators begin to open up to this broader view of agriculture while contemplating cultural reflection as it relates to food and farm in South Jersey, but the initial responses of a few to this final line of questioning reveal several obstacles to furthered perceptual expansion in this direction.

Assessing Readiness

Paying attention to the initial responses of county educators to the civic agriculture flyer helps to ascertain the readiness or willingness of the identified educational leadership to take part in culturally *transformative* dialogue on agriculture. Taking the role of ‘community planner’ I can identify three broad barriers to the readiness of the identified leadership in terms of overall posture or mindset. The first is the attitude that social change is too difficult. Some are unwilling to see *transformation* as anything less than extreme. As a result, they come to the consensus that re-connection to the land and attentiveness to the local can only occur in some romantic vision or utopia. Without the re-creation of a rural society, they intimate, people will not come to appreciate agricultural systems as relevant to their lives. Furthermore, without a less harried society most people will never have time to think critically or in a systems-oriented way about their connectedness to the whole of land, people, and community.

The second barrier to readiness is the attitude that it is not one’s duty or entitlement as an ‘educator’ to work for transformation. This attitude is shown in a variety of ways: one educator expresses a clear hesitancy to the civic agriculture questions along the lines that they might be viewed as propaganda in the classroom. When probed, this educator reveals a caution with the very idea of critical thinking itself. Reflexivity seems almost objectionable. Others were similarly put off by the idea of *questioning* for the sake of change. Questioning is radical and implies an agenda that is not mainstream. For this reason a number of educators seemed unready to accept the kind of thinking offered by the civic agriculture flyer as central

to their lines of work.

Finally the third barrier to readiness within the identified leadership is the attitude that agriculture and any of its potential ecological or social effects on South Jersey is simply not important. A few educators express that while they do not mind participating in this dialogue, they do not really care about transformation. This ‘topic’ as they see it is not relevant to their lives or their work in Burlington County. They are not interested in transformation of local ethos in *any* direction. Along these lines, as a community planner I am also cognizant of attitudes (responses) that on surface seem to show astute concern for our eco-social reality and connectedness to agriculture as I explain it, but underneath suggest an unreadiness to accept agriculture holistically. In particular, respondents who seem to think that the ‘civic agriculture’ lines of questioning are important but that South Jersey is already attentive to agriculture in this way could be revealing a reluctance to see agriculture in an other-than-narrow manner.

Of course, in analyzing educators responses to the lines of questioning offered by the civic agriculture flyer I do find signs of readiness – indications that as potential leaders of community dialogue these educators are beginning to sense the wholeness found in agriculture and its potential as a framework for revising the sustainable future our local homeplace. In terms of the impending advancement of a ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue, or a dialogue on re-connecting our lives to the land, a strength can be found in the view, shared by at least a handful of educators, that attention to nature/agriculture is engrained in people – part of the human condition. If we consider the ‘truth’ of this issue, for *practical* purposes, as a matter of social construction, then we can see how it could be effective to have some leadership invested in agricultural attentiveness in this way. Furthermore, for different reasons, it would seem equally effective that the identified leadership also includes individuals who have felt the effect of agriculture on their own identities. These individuals have emotional investment in the ability of agriculture to affect change.

It also seems important to the advancement of this community dialogue that throughout the initial interview process, most educators are enthusiastic about thinking through the agriculture-based questions I pose and many specifically express an interest in

critical thinking and cultural reflection. In addition, a majority of the educators are optimistic that the already existing interest of many current residents in local land, landscape, and ecology, can give necessary support to the advancement of a community-wide dialogue on re-connecting to the land. They identify at least three existing sources of motivation that may be helpful to draw upon in calling for attentiveness to people, land, and community. These include 1) pride in local produce or local food, 2) appreciation of or nostalgia for local agriculture, and 3) the seasonality found in local habits of buying and decoration. While these existing sources of motivation clearly do not call to everyone in the local area, such existing sources of motivation may still be quite useful as we try to advance a 'civic agriculture' dialogue for visioning the future of South Jersey.

Of course, since the onset of this research, I have been insistent that all voices be included in visioning – all attitudes be recognized and incorporated into the conversation. As one of my respondents keenly stated, "Everyone in the county has to be involved in thinking about this kind of thing and talking with others. Everyone has to see this and to begin to see a different perspective." However, I also recognize the difficulty in stipulating that even those who see no purpose in the dialogue, or who keenly object to it are included. This leads me to the suggestion that perhaps what is needed for the advancement of a dialogue among divergent groups in a local area is a "critical mass." Perhaps communal capacity for appreciating place and wholeness increases when a critical number of people and things come together, dia-logically, from all sides. Such a critical mass was evident at the January 8, 2005 Community Forum, "Re-connecting our Lives to the Land," where not only did we witness a gathering of over a hundred individuals from varied backgrounds and professions, but also a convergence of diverse resources -- high-tech audio-visual expertise, local produce, culinary talent, graphic design work, a January chill and migrating tundra swans. Never before had the January 8th participants experienced the sort of union with South Jersey as a place that was held so simply in this moment of time-space at the forum. Here, collectively, participants began to see the purpose and the need for moving forward with a dialogue of wholeness. Indeed, the critical mass that was reached at the forum allowed for a sense of urgency and excitement about stewardship and local attentiveness to people land and

community, which my individual interviews and focus groups never quite found. I will discuss the community forum and event planning in some detail later, but I bring up the forum now to make this point about a “critical mass.” It seems that reaching such a “critical mass” tends to increase the possibility of encouraging participation from those who at first saw little or no purpose in the dialogue.

Still, in terms of planning for local stewardship and sustainability, my individual interviews provide a rich detail for visioning that complements the work of the forum. Of course, the ideas reached in these individual trials at dialogue cannot claim to be as inspirational nor as all-encompassing as the community forum. For one, most of those who have demonstrated interest in the ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue from the beginning interview stages have come from particular social groups; environmentalists, agriculturists, and long-time South Jersey residents tend to be among the most interested. During these interviews I kept this latent limitation in mind, hoping for a continual addition of new opinions and ideas as I began to construct a vision for South Jersey during the 2004 summer months. We negotiated the intricacies of this introductory vision in questioning together our understandings, attitudes, and valuations of the people-land-community union in Burlington County, and later I added to this the insights that came to light at the community forum.

Senses of Place

Before I attempt to summarize and present an account of the varied and specific ideas for ‘visioning’ South Jersey that emerge from individual trials at dialogue and later from the community forum, I want to offer a closer look at the procedural intricacy of the dialogue itself. The coming pages offer not only a thick description of the discussions I have with educators on the specific topic of sense of place, but also an inspection of the kind of analysis I undertake with my respondents in dialogue. Here I pay particular attention to how this collective analysis in dialogue works to open spaces of ‘common ground’ among potentially divergent groups. In doing so, I reveal the potential for a focus on agriculture to encourage both ‘depth’ on the stage of deep dialogue (exiting ‘ego’ space) and ‘breadth’ in terms of

expanding the physical and temporal scope of what people ‘care’ about. In addition, I provide testimony for the idea that a focus on agriculture can allow individuals and communities greater analytical understandings of the meanings and emotions they attach to ‘place’ and life in ‘place.’ I demonstrate how agriculture leads to holistic, critical, and systemic thinking.

Understanding the concept

Although Burlington County has a rich heritage in agriculture, I cannot begin to negotiate a vision for the so-called “civic potentials” of agriculture with the assumption that local educators (and those they ‘teach’) find agriculture to be meaningful to life-in-place in the county. Thus dialogue here focuses not on farming but instead on general ideas of ‘sense of place’ in Burlington County. What is meaningful to the place of Burlington County? What creates ‘place’ and what destroys it? Of course, the very concept of sense of place begs some intellectual explication. Most of my principal interviewees – the college professors, outreach coordinators, and administrators with whom I speak – are familiar with the term ‘sense of place’ and have comparable understandings of the concept.

When I pose the question of sense of place in Burlington County to one Burlington County College English Professor, his reply exemplifies the conceptual understandings I receive on many occasions throughout this dialogic research. He answers,

Good question. Sense of place would have to be tied with identity, so how does one identify himself as a resident of South Jersey? And I guess for myself . . . there is a split approach [to answering the question]. I have to be here to make money but I am also here to enjoy my surroundings . . . to walk the dog in woods, go pumpkin picking. . . I think positive thoughts, a place where I want to be. For any individual one would also think of economic impact, how much does it cost to live here, buy a home (Professor of English 2004).

Such a response exhibits an astute vernacular understanding of sense of place – combining not only emotional attachment to place but also intellectual, economic, and logistical associations. Such a response is important because it reveals a pragmatism in the concept. Still, I probe Professor Buck more, presenting the idea of sense of place here in Burlington County as compared to what we might think of as sense of place in the United States South or

in Vermont or Hawaii. I offer that in such places 'sense of place' seems rather connected with both the landscape ecology and the culture of region. Yet, I explain, I rarely meet people who connect with some commonly known landscape ecology or culture of the *South Jersey* region. In fact, I rarely meet people who want to be known as 'being from' New Jersey or who really feel as though they know what 'being from' New Jersey means. Buck agrees that there does seem to be a difference between sense of place in New Jersey or South Jersey and other parts of the country. He imagines that part of the difference might be a result of the fact that 'being from' South Jersey has never been considered desirable. The exception to this could be the sense of 'being from' the shore communities (of South Jersey) but certainly in Burlington County the more common question would be, What is there in Burlington County to 'be from'? What does Burlington County specifically have to offer? Buck feels that many of his students at Burlington County College think of their futures as leaving the county.

This is a significant issue. If it is true that young residents are growing up with no attachment to Burlington County, the idea of 'being from' or 'belonging to' place seems rather problematical. Yet, perhaps this lack of allegiance is more a result of cultural inattentiveness to the unique features of the county than a signal that Burlington County has nothing distinctive to offer. When I pose the question of sense of place to Burlington County planners, the response is certainly more positive in terms of county features. For example, the County Clerk and Commissioner of the County Freeholders Office has much in mind when he thinks of sense of place in Burlington County. He visualizes, "farms and open space, the Pinelands, the Jersey shore." The commissioner assures me, "We have a well-kept secret here" (County Clerk 2004).

Indeed, one of the most common phrases that repeats throughout my interviews with Burlington County educators, officials, and administrators is the sentiment that Burlington County (and South Jersey in general) is a "well kept secret." Unfortunately, it seems its secrets are kept not only from those on the outside, but also from many local residents themselves. This would lead to the suggestion that perhaps Burlington County has some

work to do in terms of general cultural awareness of the very *idea* of sense of place. In other words, perhaps in places like Burlington County, which have more contested traditions, more diversity, more of a ‘globalized’ landscape, sense of place is something that comes with work. In order to achieve an appreciation for ‘being from’ the county, residents must try, together, for sense of place.

Of course, this is slippery terrain – personal and communal identities cannot be made like instant soup. We cannot claim to know how to build a sense of belonging in any local area. However, we can be sure that the work would entail considerable and consistent negotiation regarding why it is that people should value the land, the county, and the community of others that reside alongside them. As I begin these negotiations in Burlington County, I become aware of a few patterns in the way people express and attend to their senses of place. In the coming pages not only do I explain these patterns but I also attempt to show how deconstructing them in dialogue can provide a solid starting point for community-based expansion of the civic potentials of agriculture.

In the following passages I begin by piecing together various understandings and associations of the term ‘Garden State’ from my dialogic research. Here I show how reflecting on the idea of the ‘garden’ in dialogue has the potential to bring divergent groups together in Burlington County, specifically agriculturists and environmentalists. Next, I focus on the built environment and what I call ‘centers of place,’ again providing testimony to how dialogue can pull divergent groups together. Here I demonstrate how educators and I are able to think through why it is that suburbanites and small-town residents seem to be poised as adversaries in regard to sense of place. In doing so I reveal a way of understanding why certain urban landscapes have become associated with strong feelings and emotions. In addition, I show the potential for some of the processes of re-thinking given to us by agricultural geography to lead to a sense of common ground. Finally, I pull out of my interview transcripts a certain valuation of history and ‘tradition’ that seems to be significant. I analyze the meanings that have been attached to ‘tradition’ and look for how this relates to the idea of finding common ground. I offer these analyses as ways in which educators can

speaking to their concerns for the future of people, land and community in South Jersey.

Garden State

I have made clear the importance I place as a researcher on not assuming that county residents regard agriculture as meaningful to their lives-in-place in Burlington County. However, I do seek to understand the extent to which agriculture enters into residents' values of place. In order to accomplish this I find that collective reflection on the state nickname in dialogue reveals important insights into the meanings that local people attach to the county's heritage in agriculture. All of my interviewees are aware of the state nickname but they offer mixed ideas about what 'Garden State' means to their lives in Burlington County. For the vast majority, reflection on the 'Garden State' invokes the senses – sights of seasonal landscapes and tastes of fresh produce. Each interviewee recognizes the farming seasons at least in part, and many begin to express their fondness for the sights, smells, and tastes of peas in March, blueberries or strawberries in June, corn in August, and squash as the days turn colder.

Yet beyond these sensory-based memories of past years in the county, what stands out most clear in my survey of reflections on the 'Garden State' is the intensity with which the nickname calls to mind issues of environmental regulation in the county. Perhaps because it is a nickname – and thus 'ought' to be a reflection of real circumstances – discussing the meaning of 'Garden State' leads to the exposure of distinct environmental fears. Certainly the strongest, most value-laden feedback I receive from my 'Garden State' inquiry comes from those actively involved in the environmental community. Their responses suggest that the idea of the 'garden' of South Jersey – the working family farm – is a concept loaded with contradictory environmental subtext and certainly constitutes a dynamic medium for initiating dialogue about eco-social transformation.

In terms of the nickname as a reflection of real circumstances, consideration of the "Garden State" invites both optimism and pessimism from educators involved with environmental action in Burlington County. One educator says that the nickname makes her cringe. "It doesn't work," she declares; "I hate what has happened to the state." Another is

more confident, asserting that the ‘Garden State’ is still very much a part of what Burlington County can claim as a place:

The ‘Garden State’ is here in the orchards, the cranberries, the blueberries, and other ‘special place’ crops.

Both of these respondents have clearly high valuations of local agriculture, yet differ on their optimism for the current landscape.

Other respondents express lower valuations of local agriculture. Indeed, the most noteworthy reactions are perhaps those that were most unanticipated – the negative associations of ‘garden’ that come from some of the most ecologically-minded of the interview set. These negative reactions were surprising not because such associations are necessarily uncommon but because in the context of ‘sense of place’ one would not imagine the ‘garden’ as a place of life and growth could become pejorative to a ‘green’ subset of thinkers. In truth many ‘negative’ reactions are quickly modified to reveal a more neutral perspective. One professor with a background in conservation biology advises,

From an ecological perspective, of course, farming is a mixed bag. I did see one organic produce farm in the county, but it is hard to find someone locally who is growing organically (Professor of Environmental Science 2004).

The ‘garden’ of South Jersey – the working family farm – is at once dangerous and innocent to those with a mind for ecosystems thinking. Such suspicion of agriculture is quite common from environmentalists in the particular context of Burlington County as well as in broader circles. In fact, at times the disconnect between the farming community and the environmental community in South Jersey seems larger than the disconnect between the suburbanite community and the farmers (Mason 1994, Hayes-Conroy 2005). The tension between environmental preservation/regulation advocacy groups and farm advocacy groups can be especially glaring.

A focus group with the environmental advocacy group the Pinelands Preservation Alliance in the summer of 2004 unveils some of these tensions. As our dialogue moves toward deconstruction of the idea of the “Garden State,” alliance employees offer stern accounts of the ‘garden’ of South Jersey as it applies to their land areas of interest:

Agriculture has a tendency in the Pinelands to introduce changes to water and soil chemistry and although regulations support forestry and agriculture, we always advocate for kinds of agriculture that take effects into account. . . With [tree farming] the issue is the current trends that are moving toward monocropping, toward monocultural plantation. Pine trees are grown for pulp. They plant hybrids and do not plant the under story growth, etc. Fortunately we have headed most of it off. We don't want a plantation; we need *forest*, wildlife habitat (Director of Outreach, PPA 2004).

Although the Pinelands Preservation Alliance maintains that there *is* a style of forestry they would not oppose, overall the organization seems to regard tree farming and other kinds of agriculture as an artificial element of disturbance that has been added to the ecosystem. This leads to the idea that the 'garden' is somehow 'unnatural' and ecologically suspect. While this way of thinking is undoubtedly compelling given that a number of farm practices are arguably 'unsustainable' and anti-ecological, one would wonder whether such an outlook can only lead to unconstructive interactions between environmentalists and agriculturists – two groups that seem to hold the land as a common interest.

I question the president of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, about this apparently unhelpful tension. The president concedes that although the Pinelands Alliance and the agricultural community often seem to be on opposite sides of an argument, in reality the environmental community has a much starker conflict with developers and builders than with the agriculturists. Regarding the farming community he confirms,

We have more in common than we are willing to admit. So it ends up that we think of ourselves as adversaries (President, PPA 2004).

In terms of trying to interact constructively with the farming community, the Alliance president insists that the Pinelands Preservation Alliance has talked and thought a great deal about how to make it happen.

It would be great to have a set of programs where we discuss the fact that we have more common ground, where we discuss agricultural practices that are better for the environment (such as drip irrigation). In the best of all possible worlds, it would be one of the top focuses of our work. It's so obvious you don't need to say it; it's obvious that we need that (President, PPA 2004).

What this excerpt from my dialogue with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance makes clear is that the negative connotations of the 'garden' that seem to be held by the environmental community do not run as deep as first seems apparent. As the Alliance president alludes, the

key to rising above the environmental-agricultural tensions is perhaps as simple as finding a collective willingness to admit to the *existence* of shared values. In other words, both communities do not need to agree on the specifics of their values, they simply need to recognize that they 'have more in common than they have been willing to admit.'

Along these lines, the focus group with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, allows a fuller understanding of the promise of community negotiation. As we collectively reflect upon and analyze our values of farm, farmland, and regional ecology, we reveal the simple pragmatism of acknowledging common ground. The concept of 'sense of place' itself becomes much more meaningful as we re-think our ideas together in dialogue. Such minor revelations are indeed the first steps of the process of cultural transformation through agriculturally-based dialogue. Accordingly, on the particular day in which my first dialogic interaction with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance takes place, the mood of encounter becomes one of anticipation. Having eased into seminar-style conversation with an insecurity as to where the discussion was headed, we become increasingly aware of the importance of this dialogic activity. By the end, we all remark on the functional energy that has been created by helping each other to think through the 'whats,' 'hows' and 'whys' of our individual senses of place in relation to the working family farm. The 'wisdom' of the 'garden' has begun to make sense; we can feel the potential for this kind of dialogue to stimulate change – on both a level of ideology and a level of activity.

Centers of Place

Of course, there is much more to 'place' in Burlington County than the 'garden' and all of its attached positive and negative associations. Especially in the more densely populated western part of the county, people's associations with the county can be quite urban. Identified landscape features here are more often city parks and churches than corn rows and Pines (County Clerk 2004, Director of Economic Development 2004, Professor of Fine Arts 2004). If the 'garden' is to be utilized for the instigation of cultural transformation, then we need to make sure that it really does fit with all of the other prominent 'features' of the county. Conceptions of agriculture must be reworked so that they correspond with broader impressions of Burlington County as it stands in its interconnected urban-suburban-

rural whole. Thus dialogue turns to examine sense of place as it relates to more urban focal points in Burlington County – the various hubs, junctions, and town centers that serve as sites of both physical and metaphorical gathering.

In respect to this ‘gathering,’ it is perhaps telling that many Geographers who have written about the meanings/values of various landscape types (Yi-Fu Tuan and John Fraser Hart to name a few) have described the rural landscape as associated with ideas of partial disorder. Visions of rusted-out tractors, not-yet-fixed barns, and fallow fields come to mind. It could be a result of this implied dis-order that rural sense of place seems to find a counterpart in urban sense of place. Urbanity would seem to offer a way of organization – providing centers, paths, and boundaries through which to take charge of not only one’s physical understanding of an area but also one’s emotional understandings of surroundings. Urbanism can give order to meanings and values of life-in-place – a structure to sort out our relationship with the local environment. Yet in examining the idea that urbanity brings a certain ‘order’ to meanings of life-in-place, we can also become aware of the extent to which particular senses of the built environment can either complement or conflict with particular senses of the rural. Certainly, not all patterns of town development interact with the rural in the same way. Disparate urban/suburban forms may correspond with differing understandings of rurality and lead to different approaches to land management. Sensing this, as I engage in dialogue with South Jersey educators I urge them to discuss the kinds of town design – the urban forms – that they find valuable to their sense of belonging in the county.

Quickly I become aware of an important pattern to the educators’ place assessments. The vast majority of my interviewees designate only a certain kind of urban design as worthwhile. The kind of design they cherish is best described as the walkable small town – one in which a *center* has been clearly defined and is easily identifiable. Such a design can be seen most readily in the county’s historic small towns – places like Riverton, Moorestown, Burlington, and Mount Holly. Moreover, not only do many of my interviewees reveal similar appreciation for the necessity of ‘centers’ but they also express comparable understandings the failures of newer suburban development:

The riverfront towns seem to have a good sense of place with their town centers. But Mount Laurel and suburbs like that are different. (Scientist, PC 2004)

Outsiders have a vision of New Jersey as a turnpike but in South Jersey there are so many small communities that all grew up with little downtowns. Now many places are evolving, centers of place are diminishing. (Professor of Fine Arts 2004)

One farmer and prominent figure in local planning and administration describes the newer suburban development that has taken place in the designated 'growth' areas of the Pine Barrens and conveys a sense of dismay at the oversight of the importance of design.

There is intensive growth in the Pine Barrens in these growth areas. The Pinelands Commission planned for growth but they didn't plan for how one can grow. They forgot Smart Growth, livable walkable communities. They missed that in the Pine Barrens. In Hamilton they did a pretty good job but in Egg Harbor it was awful: malls connected to malls. It is an awful place. . . People who live in these Pine Barrens areas do not want more growth. (Cranberry Farmer 2004).

As I continue to dialogue with Burlington County educators and administrators about the relationship between sense of place and land planning, I uncover much frustration in regard to a perceived lack of foresight on the part of not only town planners but also area developers. Another prominent local figure, a Head Librarian at Burlington County College and scholar of local place history and genealogy, depicts an additional misfortune of the Burlington County landscape:

I lived in a wonderfully old 18th Century house in Lumberton Township. Across the street from us the farm was sold off and developers built houses in a very unplanned way. These houses didn't look like farmhouses. And the developers didn't listen to planners who said 'use gravel so that there is sufficient drainage'. They still paved over the driveways and created a runoff disaster (Director of Libraries 2004).

This kind of commentary on development would seem to have multiple implications. First, the above assessments of the built environment express quite clearly a sense that *something* is being 'missed,' 'overlooked,' or otherwise ignored when it comes to newer suburban development. Second, and perhaps related, this commentary reveals an understanding that planning, if it is to be good, ought to be focused on centers of some kind. Third, and finally, these excerpts hint at a certain wariness or even fear of change – a call for re-evaluation of the evolution of landscape that is currently taking place in South Jersey.

Interestingly, county planners themselves express similar concerns with the oversight of current development, the importance of centers, and the need to reassess landscape change. The 2004 Burlington County Clerk and the county Director of Economic Development

together explain:

The riverfront communities have a very long history. They are all cohesive towns and all have a center of town. The people in them have a connection with the surrounding community and the town as a place. If you go over to sprawl, the residents are often newcomers to the area. The same happening in the old farming communities while newer sites like Mount Laurel have no 'center of place.' Shamong and Tabernacle were once Pineland communities but they now have lots of sprawl and no distinct center. (County Clerk 2004, Director of Economic Development 2004)

The addition of this commentary from county planners offers a new clue as to what might be missing or overlooked in the newer sprawl development. Suburban sprawl is not simply 'unpleasant' because it lacks a center, but rather it is displeasing because it lacks a center where something specific is gathered: Both the County Clerk and the county Director of Economic Development understand the walkable, center-defined small town as valuable because it the kind of site where 'tradition' can be located and attentiveness to local particularities – local people, local businesses, local customs, and perhaps local ecology – materializes. Indeed, not only do these county administrators hint that having a 'center of place' is as crucial to the life of a place as is a heart to a body or a nucleus to a cell, but they also describe the very idea of place as something that needs 'tradition' and attentiveness to the *local* in order to exist.

This understanding of 'place' as inherently connected to 'tradition' and to attentiveness to local particularities is quite significant in terms of certain residents wariness or fear of change. In fact, it seems as though change in itself is not what these residents fear. They do not seek complete *stasis* in the small world of Burlington County. What they do seek is *continuity* – a way of consistently linking the past and present of their homeplace with the future. Observance of tradition and a keen attentiveness to local economic, ecological, physical, and socio-political uniquenesses would allow for such continuity. Disregard for tradition and local uniqueness leads to a lack of continuity and thus lack of 'place' as many understand it. One Burlington County Fine Arts Professor describes this insight well as it relates to her own sense of place in the once small farm village of Tabernacle, South Jersey:

Tabernacle had a planting community, now the suburbs have swamped that. Suburban people come in without a sense of place, they swamp the place – ruin it – and then they decide they want to try to create a sense of place because the area lacks

it. It is, in that way, a little bit of the 'last in' syndrome. The last ones in don't want any MORE development because they came here to get country not people. So, in other words, they came in, ruined 'place' and now they are trying to create 'place.' (Fine Arts Professor 2004).

This professor continues her explication of the situation of modern suburbanization in Burlington County expressing how suburban development may be imbued with valid meanings, but these meanings have no attachment to local uniqueness (particularly local ecological uniqueness). In other words, the suburban landscape demonstrates certain values, certain meanings of life (anywhere), but these values are not in harmony with the idea of an attentive life-in-place.

Folks have moved to Tabernacle, to the 'country' but they have turned it into a suburb. All of the new houses have sprawling green lawns, kept up by pesticides. Another example is the playground that they have built in place of woodlands . . . They cut down all the trees and put in baseball fields and a huge playground. Now they want you to drive slow by it, but its a blight. They have taken something beautiful where kids could have interacted with the natural world and put something you would find in a suburb nearer to Philadelphia. They are bringing the suburban way of life – the soccer mom mentality – and a suburban aesthetic to a special rural place. (Fine Arts Professor 2004)

Clearly the newer kind of suburban 'sense of place' that this professor disapprovingly speaks of is defensible but not in line with what is really in *place* and what has been in place for generations in Tabernacle. From such commentary we begin to understand how the suburban sprawl landscape becomes associated with a whole different set of values than the walkable small town. Indeed, while Burlington County's walkable small towns provide physical and metaphorical space for honoring continuity, many of the newer kinds of built environment in South Jersey (non-nucleated development) do not seem to correspond with cultural attentiveness to the local and to tradition. Yet, what do these perceived differences in urban form have to do with local agriculture? More pointedly, to what extent is this pattern of cherishing the walkable small town consistent with a cultural attentiveness to small-scale farming? And, conversely, to what extent is the choice to live in newer suburban development inconsistent with cultural attention to agriculture? What can we learn from weaving local understandings of agriculture into this discussion?

Without a doubt, the connection of certain types of built environment with certain systems of value, belief, and judgment gives us insight into local cultural treatment of

agriculture. I mean this not only in the most obvious sense – the fact that people who buy luxury homes on once-agriculturally productive land are demonstrating a certain level of inattentiveness to farming and farmland – but also in a more complex sense: It would seem that appreciation of the walkable, small town lifestyle stems from the same kind of mindset that would also promote attentiveness to small scale agriculture. I say this because first, agriculture is considered, certainly, a local uniqueness and a local tradition; that is, at least the small-scale family farm is something that many long-term residents see as a defining feature of the county^a. As South Jersey educators and I come to see the walkable small town as a center where attentiveness to local particularities materializes, we recognize the county’s agricultural heritage as part of this.

Yet, there is a second reason to consider agriculture and the walkable small town as inherently connected. A few educators indicate a sense that both the small scale farm and walkable small town can be read as important parts of a broader vision for alternatives to conventional industrial ways-of-life. In fact, although they never name it directly, I find a handful of educators edging toward the idea that the walkable small town might be seen as the townscape equivalent of the “post-productivist” family farm – the alternative to “productivist” era industrial big-business. If we think back to the explanations of the co-existing eras of productivist and post-productivist agriculture in Chapter One, the productivist era was concerned with bigness, quantity, and increased output while the post-productivist alternative focused on size reduction, quality, and better integration with other rural objectives. Educators offer explanations of the walkable small town versus luxury suburban development that can be set up in the same way. The walkable small towns they describe can speak to a desire for smaller housing, quality architecture, and better community integration; Some educators further indicate that the walkable small town is in-line, perhaps, with a philosophy in which less is more, mass-production is ‘out,’ and uniqueness of location and experience take top priority.

County planners and administrators seem to validate the linkage between small-scale agriculture and the walkable small town that educators suggest above. Specifically, the

^a This is particularly true of those in the production of blueberries, cranberries, peaches, corn, tomatoes, and other commonly ‘Jersey’ crops.

County Clerk and the Director of Economic Development discuss the county's attempts to economically revitalize the riverfront towns as an attempt to provide an "alternative" lifestyle. They claim to be marketing the "type of community" that is surviving there. The Director of Economic Development explains,

Some people are interested in the values that exist in living in these kinds of small town communities. There is a niche market for the ones that have a sense of place, that *have values* (Director of Economic Development 2004).

When probed, both of these county administrators suggest that "having values" is synonymous with not only "attentiveness to local particulars" but also (in some cases) the ecologically-sound economic ideal of "small is beautiful." In their view, the small towns of South Jersey are exemplars of the kind of setting for which there is a growing yet select 'niche market.' Such settings have come to be appreciated by this select group as 'alternative' landscapes, filled with 'alternative' values, and promoting 'alternative' ways of life. The walkable small town is perceived as a place where people are already more conscious of industrial impacts on ecology and community. The conventional, or non-alternative in this line of thought would be, of course, the suburban auto-dependant landscape of luxury 'McMansions' that is ever more present in the county. So, interestingly, while the purchase of a new luxury townhome in the county may be a sign of increased social status, there is also indication that in the eyes of a number of residents, choosing the new development means deciding against an ethic of smallness, quality artisan work, and locational uniqueness; For some South Jersey residents, choosing new development means settling for an industrial ideology or mindset which abstracts the *real* particularities of place in Burlington County, replacing them with features – i.e. sprawling lawns, larger houses with more amenities, high-maintenance landscaping – that seem to emerge from anywhere or nowhere in particular.

In at least some circles, then, the walkable small town is being read as a non-industrial alternative to sprawl and hence might be the 'choice' location for residents who come to think (more) along the holistic, eco-systemic lines that I try to promote through agricultural dialogue. For this reason, I find it is probably telling that much of the community support for agriculture that exists in Burlington County can be found in these walkable small towns. Many of the same individuals who are interested in the revitalization of Burlington

County's historic downtowns are also interested in reviving (or creating anew) local weekly farm markets and other ways of engaging the farming and non-farming communities in mutually beneficial activities. Startup weekend farm markets in the center-defined towns of Riverton and Collingswood are prime examples. Yet, interestingly, these farm markets are not just patronized by the Burlington County residents living in these small towns; those who find homes in the newer suburban sprawl areas of the county also frequent these markets.

Evidently, by pointing out the contradictions between the valuation of newer suburban development and attentiveness to small-scale agriculture I do not mean to suggest that 'newer' suburbanites cannot appreciate local agriculture. On the contrary, much of my earliest research from South Jersey under the Stars proves that they can and do appreciate local agriculture (Hayes-Conroy 2005). However, by pointing out these contradictions, which have surfaced through dialogue, I do suggest where difficulties of attentiveness to wholeness through agriculture may lie. If we are to reach toward cultural transformation through agriculture – specifically toward increased cultural embeddedness in the whole of people-land-community – then suburban residents must come to terms with these contradictions in whatever ways they can. This insight came out clearly from many of those who spoke at the January 8 community forum, both during break-out groups and during the larger panel discussion gathering. In addition to this, it has been recognized that *all* residents, whether farmer or suburbanite, small town resident or new homeowner, must begin to search out other contradictions in values, meanings, and ways-of-life and must work to come to terms with these as well. Such 'coming to terms' can certainly be activated by the kind of dialogic 'research' process I have portrayed in this section on urban senses of place. People can come together and begin to deconstruct, through dialogue on local *agri-culture*, their senses of place, their values and ways-of-knowing, and their relative connection to land-ecology and community. Individuals and groups can learn how to be aware of continuity – of uniquenesses of place and of traditions.

Tradition

Of course, such awareness is difficult in South Jersey. Demographic diversity

coupled with the very thorough integration of what might be best described as a 'Western' or 'globalized' corporate consumer landscape makes it quite difficult to determine what it is that is genuinely 'unique' to the local and what it is that 'tradition' points to in this place. Yet it appears that understanding 'tradition' may be vital to promoting sense of place and stewardship here. Hence I begin to explore the concept of tradition with the formal and non-formal educators of Burlington County. In dialogue, we begin not by discussing directly whether 'tradition' is important, but instead examining how people might view history as relevant to their senses of belonging. In doing so I return to the basic question: what does Burlington County have for people to 'belong to' or for residents to 'be from?' I find that there are a number of ways in which residents who outwardly search for something to belong to in South Jersey call upon local history or "heritage." Indeed, many Burlington County educators suggest to me the need for one's sense of place to be legitimized by the gravity that comes out of a renewal and remembrance of the past.

One of the most simple ways in which a sense of the past links up with a sense of belonging in place is through the development of a hobby or interest in learning about historical ways-of-life in the South Jersey region. At least half of Burlington County's diverse municipalities have active Historical Societies. In addition, town festivals and fairs, in an attempt to grasp at a unique point of interest, often draw upon themes of old-fashioned life (Hayes-Conroy 2005). Local history 'buffs' and other interested individuals flock to places like Whitesbog Preservation Trust or "living history" farms and museums in order to get a feel for the local past (Director of Programming, Whitesbog 2004). Yet, for many South Jersey residents, this narrow vision of local heritage feels rather unconnected to current ways-of-life, and while they may feel that places like Whitesbog are quaint, they also view them as rather irrelevant.

Indeed, all of the South Jersey educators I engage in dialogue express a sense that there is not much left in 'culture' today that speaks to the uniquenesses of South Jersey's past. True, the Pine Barrens has some folklore, and residents continue to frequent historically-themed events, but as a whole, society in Burlington County is not positioned close to the past in any substantial way. It seems that our social distance from the local heritage of both

people and place has reached grand proportions; all of my interviewees reveal this to me (in their own words) as a current fact of life in the modern world. Yet, I find that when we begin to speak of the importance of history or heritage to their own senses of place, the educators who have been long-term residents of the county allude to a 'tradition' that goes much farther than a simple curiosity for past ways-of-life.

Indeed, 'tradition' in Burlington County, as anywhere, is intricate and multifaceted. It is not simply a recognition of the ways-of-life that have been encased and exhibited in the Historical Societies, and it is surely not explained by all long-term residents in the same way. Indeed, it is quite possible that at any given time different groups and individuals in Burlington County will contradict each other's ideas of local tradition because they see different points in its value. There are many examples of ways of conceiving 'tradition' beyond the case of those for whom 'history' is a meaningful hobby. For instance, an environmental view would see 'worthy' traditions as perhaps both stemming from the natural world and demonstrating an appreciation for it. 'Tradition', then, need not be ratified by any particular *human* history, so long as the ecological integrity of the land – its various ecosystemic traditions – is upheld. Local environmentalists definitely express such an 'eco-centric' view of 'tradition' in dialogue with me.

This environmental take on tradition is certainly worthwhile and perhaps vital to the cause of future ecological sustainability. However, in Burlington County, the importance of tradition to eco-social concerns is much more complex. For instance, in Burlington County agricultural traditions have been upheld whether or not they have been 'found' to be in the best interest of the land-ecology. They also have been upheld whether or not they have been found to be in the best financial interest of the farm business (Burlington County Agricultural Agent 2004). There is something else to many agricultural traditions that keeps them alive. As an expert in area agriculture, the 2004 Burlington County Agricultural Agent offers important insights into local farming traditions. He demonstrates a keen feel for the significance of ingrained human habits:

Agriculture here is steeped in tradition that is very deep. For example, the bottom line is not always to produce the exact product that someone at this moment wants to buy. I know a sweet corn farmer whose father and grandfather were sweet corn farmers. The land has always been in sweet corn. That's the farmer's identity, a

family tradition in corn. It's an unwritten paradigm. People don't want to get rid of these traditions (Burlington County Agricultural Agent 2004).

The idea that there is an 'unwritten paradigm' that undergirds South Jersey agriculture, and perhaps other long-founded South Jersey traditions, is quite important. Human patterns of life and habits are established, watched, and learned through time such that they become associated with many kinds of emotion and become ways of locating identity.

In this way, 'tradition' becomes of utmost value to some South Jersey residents – associated with the very meanings of their lives-in-place. If we are to uphold these traditions as functions of sense of place and as reasons to encourage stewardship, then the primary question becomes, can these South Jersey residents make an argument for why it is that 'tradition,' as they see it, should not be ignored? This query I pose in a variety of ways to the formal and non-formal educators of Burlington County. Pessimism in response to this query runs deep. One of the problems that emerges in dialogue is that localized 'tradition' necessitates prolonged experience with and commitment to the people-land-community of Burlington County, but this conflicts with the mobility and individuality of modern society. In a way, 'tradition' seems inherently opposed to the globalizing, mobilizing ways of life that many enjoy. This leads many of the educators who express the importance of tradition to also express a certain hopelessness. Their concern for loss adheres to a sentiment that nothing can be done. One county economics professor states plainly,

Traditions are valuable in South Jersey but if they are not valued by the current people, then the traditions are irrelevant (Professor of Economics 2004).

Yet, perhaps this sense of futility in regard to the upkeep of 'tradition' is really just an awareness that South Jersey residents lack a common means to express what the term signifies for them. As the previous remarks on 'tradition' make clear, the 'traditions' of South Jersey that this professor speaks of are countless, and varied, taking hold in 'minor' social settings – within families and small groups or institutions. As such, they are not easily summarized or encapsulated in words – each one having to do with particular people, certain lineages, distinct kinships. In addition, as the county Agricultural Agent implies above, these traditions are often distinctively *placed* – allowing for a sense of belonging not only to a particular group of people but also a particular piece of land. Thus, when we try to understand 'tradition,' individual plots and buildings can be just as important as specific

human ties and family lines. One local librarian, historian, and genealogy expert indicates the importance of specific places to ‘tradition’ and explains that she always emphasizes a people-place union in the local town histories she writes:

I like the people and the place together because they tell the story. You cannot tell the story of people without place and you cannot tell the story of place without people. They are thoroughly linked and it is important to have them connected (Director of Libraries 2004).

From this local historian as well as the county Agricultural Agent and others, I am offered a vision of ‘tradition’ as a wide assortment of countless behaviors, customs, ideas, and events, that are thoroughly linked to both specific settings and specific persons in Burlington County. A few identifiable ‘larger’ traditions exist – perhaps the Pine Barrens Cranberry Festival or municipal tree-lighting ceremonies at Christmas are examples. Yet to find a widely agreed upon ‘tradition’ that is tied to particulars of people and place in South Jersey is rare. Where, then, is there common ground to be found in ‘tradition’? Is ‘tradition’ destined to be divisive in terms of any communal valuation of place or sense of belonging? Certainly not. In dialogue with long-term South Jersey educators, we come to find that those who find value in ‘tradition’ *do* have a distinct commonality. Indeed, all of those who express a sense of belonging that is linked with ‘tradition’ share a particular fear of loss. Although that which is ‘lost’ may be different, all share a sense of ‘loss’ as a manifestation of the changes to landscape and social structure in South Jersey that they see as out of their control.

The existence of this common ground in ‘loss’ has not gone unnoticed. The very fact that long-term residents expect to be understood when they speak of ‘tradition’ as a standard, non-specific South Jersey phenomenon demonstrates a keen sensitivity to this common ground. Others express it as a simple fact of lengthy observation – the fact that awareness of seemingly uncontrolled changes to one’s surroundings breeds concern for loss. For example, the director of the County Cultural and Heritage Affairs division of the County Parks Service offers the simple insight that,

People who have lived in the county longer and who have seen the landscape change and farms disappear have been more inclined to have an appreciation for agriculture and open space as it declines (Director of Cultural and Heritage Affairs 2004).

Again here Goldsmith implies that the noted appreciation for agriculture and open space has not resulted from a common recollection of all of the particular, varied ‘traditions’ of farming and native ecology. Rather this appreciation stems from a collective apprehension of seemingly uncontrollable causal forces that have the potential to transform ‘tradition’ as a standard, non-specific phenomenon. The before-mentioned local librarian and historian sharpens this statement when she speaks quite decisively of the influx of newcomers into the county’s newer suburban sprawl:

The people moving into these houses don’t have tradition here. They don’t belong to it the way that older residents do (Director of Libraries 2004).

Olsen speaks once more of an understood, tacit standard of ‘tradition’ and of what it means to ‘belong’. She gives further support to the idea that ‘tradition,’ in terms of any wide social commonality, may best be described as a cultural phenomenon which stems from a shared concern: a fear that one’s long-founded sense of belonging in place will be ruptured by newly arrived abrupt changes. In other words, it is the very existence of *apprehension* and not the specifics of loss that offers commonality here.

In dialogue, I offer this newly found ‘common ground’ as a point of encouragement for enhanced sense of place and stewardship. Specifically, I offer by considering tradition in this way, those who have expressed a link between ‘tradition’ and their sense of place in Burlington County can locate a sense of control and empowerment. The control (over future development) comes from the idea that dialogue itself can be culturally productive and transformative. Educators and other residents resist the irrelevance of tradition (and thus of ‘place’ as they see it) with the very act of coming together to determine, negotiate, and legitimize personal understandings of tradition. The location of such a sense of control and empowerment is, indeed, a first step of community planning, and thus can be seen as a very minor first step towards wider ethos change in South Jersey.

Having expressed the essentials of this strategy for change through dialogue to my respondents, the majority of my interviews *do* end with affirmation as to the value of this very research process on the culture of South Jersey. Most respondents appreciate that I have opened a dialogue with local people who I identify as ‘educators’ in the hopes that they then turn to continue this dialogue with their ‘students.’ Although we still cannot know how far

the dialogue will be carried, I do not get a sense that my work is unfruitful. My optimism for this work as the (very minor) beginnings of a crucial local transformation in ethos is encouraged by some of the leading figures in education, planning, and agriculture in Burlington County. Although a handful of my respondents are clearly not confident about the potential for a visible change in ethos within Burlington County, most would agree that agricultural dialogue has the potential to transform, albeit in small ways. At least, they have begun to see how this dialogue in their own lives and in their own South Jersey ‘community work’ can bring divergent groups together and can encourage local people to become more attentive to the concerns of other residents.

A Vision for South Jersey

Through thick description of the trials with agriculture-based dialogue that come out of the topic of ‘sense of place,’ I have begun to show how I intend for educators to take control over the future development of South Jersey. The culturally-reflective agricultural dialogue that I try out has called for a re-assessment of the ways we think and act in regard to the local. I have tried to create dialogue that helps society in South Jersey reconsider its common understandings of land and farm and its positionality (social positioning) in relation to all aspects of the agricultural experience. In spreading this dialogue educators can begin to encourage a local learning culture in which it is of greater social value to think critically and holistically about one’s place in the region. In pressing for such reflection on life-in-place in Burlington County, educators can begin to make room for a heightened sense of belonging and stewardship in the region. Although not all Burlington County educators are equally committed to furthering this dialogue-based vision for change in South Jersey, many have demonstrated an interest in at least doing ‘their small part’ in promoting a greater civic awareness of “wholeness” and of the need for stewardship. They look to each other, and to me as a researcher, to determine exactly what can be done to spread these ideas further. Thus, I work with these educators, and later with a broader group of South Jersey residents at the January 8 forum, to come up with an introductory, malleable vision for progress in South

Jersey. In the coming pages I encapsulate the ideas for change that emerge in agricultural dialogue during interviews, focus groups, the forum planning process, and the January 8th community forum itself. I explore what this vision for holistic attentiveness to people, land, and community looks like in context, in the eyes of South Jersey ‘locals’.

Visioning in terms of sustainability

Beyond the initial responses of educators to the six civic agriculture questions, the lines of inquiry presented by the flyer open up multiple spaces of rich discussion. Throughout the entire dialogic research process I try to grasp what materializes in each of these spaces of discussion, echoing ideas and suggestions across the county, in order to compose a introductory, flexible vision for South Jersey. Again I find direction from the realm of Community Economic Development and the emotive conception of ‘visioning’ that community-based development offers:

A vision is the articulation of a desired future. It should be ambitious but not impossible. It should present a *compelling stretch*. It should inspire and move people to action. It should be something we can hold ourselves accountable to. (HI alliance for C-BED visioning exercises 2001 appendix 1, 1)

Certainly, if transformational dialogue on the wholeness of agriculture is to proceed throughout the county, the ‘initiative’ must be backed up by a vision that is indeed “visionary” – that can inspire local people to shifts in both thought and action. In order to weave together a defensible and compelling vision, during my empirical research I pay close attention to the meanings of life in place that educators create, to how and why they are created and what the meanings say. As seen through my depictions of the ‘senses of place’ dialogue, this is undoubtedly planning work of a *cultural* sort – perhaps exemplary of the kind of reflexive, applied, cultural agricultural geography that I insist upon in Chapter One. Yet as I come back to analyze the dialogue with ‘vision’ in mind, I find that numerous paradigms of agricultural geography become relevant once again. Chapter One of this thesis looked for what I called ‘sustainable geographies of agriculture’ – ways that agricultural geography can speak to the wholeness of agriculture. Now, having accomplished rather detailed cultural analysis, I find the full “story” of agricultural geography, not simply the cultural approach, effective for drawing a collective visionary response.

Recall that historically agricultural geography divided agriculture into three issues or approaches: environmental, economic, and social. Fittingly, modern development thinkers also assign the same three facets to sustainability. I use these categories to delineate an agriculturally-mediated vision for South Jersey, that has been created by Burlington County educators and residents and that encompasses the totality of ecology, economy, and society for the region. I describe each of the categories below as “agriculturally positioned.” Of course, to reiterate an already well-established point, by suggesting that ecology, economy, or society will be ‘re-positioned’ by agriculture, I am referring to the holism and eco-systemic thinking that attentiveness to agriculture inspires and I am not suggesting re-creation of an agricultural/rural society.

An agriculturally positioned environment

The environmental component of South Jersey’s preliminary vision would include both land management (native woodlands, active farmland, issues of hydrology and soil maintenance) as well as town planning (neighborhood design, county layout, issues of transportation and housing). Through the explication of ‘senses of place’ one can already gather that the environmental vision might include nucleated urban growth schemes – i.e. the “walkable small town” with a center in which community in general and *continuity* in particular can be honored. Indeed, if we are to emphasize care of a wider community of ‘others,’ it appears quite important to have a concrete and recognizable space that, in its design as a place of gathering, appreciates interaction, cooperation, and connectivity. We have seen that in South Jersey, there are many within the educational leadership who seem to think that the human-scaled, ‘historic,’ walkable small town does this quite well. In addition, the smallness, moderation, and conservation offered by the small town ‘alternative’ would seem to go in line with overall attentiveness to ecological integrity and particularly to the scope of one’s ‘ecological footprint’ in both regional and global terms.

Yet, beyond the walkable small town and an environmentalist appeal to maintain ecological integrity in general, what else do South Jersey educators and forum participants point to? One educator articulates the visionary sentiments of the whole quite clearly when

he comments that “Everyone in the county has to be involved in thinking about this kind of thing and talking with others. . . like the builders who are building the houses, the developers. . . they have to be able to explain their perspective too.” In this way, Burlington County residents call attention to an argument for a new way to address environmental issues that has also been addressed quite recently in the literature of agricultural geography; specifically, they imply that in planning for the future of the region we might consider the idea of “multiple environmental knowledges,” and local “ways-of-knowing” about the land. I have explained previously that some recent research within agricultural geography has focused on uncovered contrasting understandings of nature (specifically appropriate management of farm environs) between farmers and conservationists or environmental ‘experts’ (Morris 2003, 8). In South Jersey, my dialogue with the Pinelands Preservation Alliance definitely suggests the need for farmers and environmentalists to negotiate their divergent understandings of the land-ecology and their trials at wholeness. This need is reiterated again at the forum by a number of participants who suggest a recognition of farmers as stewards and a simultaneous continuation of research that is aimed at making farming more ecologically acceptable. One intriguing example comes from a horse farmer who reminds the rest of the 100-plus gathered participants that although gambling may be a part of the global corporate consumer economy that others have frowned upon for “ecological” reasons, allowing slot machines at the nearby racetrack would help his business to stay afloat and help to keep his land in agriculture.

Of course, in terms of negotiating wholeness, this last example moves way beyond the professed farmer-environmentalist divide, inviting discussions of suburban development, regional economics, and perhaps ethics, to name a few. Throughout both my individual dialogues and the community forum much expressive commentary emerges that points to a vision for South Jersey to recognize a variety of “situated knowledges” -- knowledges that come from the way in which an individual is positioned in the world -- in regard to wholeness and the idea of re-connecting to the land. Pointedly, this vision is *not* to allow homeowners, developers, farmers, scientists, environmentalists, and the like each a little leeway to do what they see is meaningful, but instead it is to interrogate the different situated understandings of wholeness and the land-ecology in the local region to come up with negotiated ways to live

more ecologically sustainable lives. In agricultural geography we have seen such interrogation explained by Jonathan Murdoch and Judy Clark in their paper, “Sustainable Knowledge.” Their work shows that local knowledge can be both ‘scientific’ and ‘sustainable’ but must be investigated as it is put to practice in each particular context. They specifically examine knowledge of farm-environs but they use their findings to advise a new approach to general environmental knowledge in social science, which stresses the recognition of a ‘hybridity’ of knowledges to be mixed, negotiated upon, and examined in action (Murdoch 1994).

In a similar way this idea of “sustainable knowledge” can be included in the vision for South Jersey that county residents conceive. As in Murdoch’s research, sustainable knowledge in South Jersey can be enlightened or positioned by agriculture but would go much further than simply getting the public aware of the environmental difficulties and delights of farming. Sustainable knowledge would be created by bringing together voices of scientists, farmers, philosophers, naturalists, and other local people in attempts to think through land-management concerns as we attempted at the January 8 forum. Certainly, in the case of Burlington County, although a number of the educational leaders who participated in the visioning process and the forum consider themselves environmental experts, not one of them claims to know how to bring ‘sustainability’ to the environmental/ecological management of any kind of land (farmland, woodland, urban property). Subsequently, the South Jersey vision they articulate embraces greater cooperation – planning for round-tables and discussions in which an ecologically viable way forward is continuously charted, tested, and re-charted. Along these lines a number of educators state plainly that there is a need for a continuation of community forums relating to the local environment. (This will come up again in discussion of an agriculturally-positioned *society*). Of course, such forums would have to include discourse on the influence of greater world ‘structures’ beyond the local, such as how to make non-local businesses accountable to local ecological particularities. In this way, the negotiated ecological ‘ways forward’ need not and should not feel sudden or drastic but instead would be considered reasonable and commonplace outcomes of small-scale community action.

An agriculturally positioned economy

Because they are so intricately connected, discussion of a vision for an agriculturally positioned environment leads directly to the discussion of an agriculturally positioned economy. To explain the articulated vision here, once again I find relevance in agricultural geography's political economic depictions of modern trajectories in farming. Specifically important are the aforementioned post-industrial, post-productivist economic strategies of family farming, which can give clarity to the preliminary visioning process. In dialogue, I find that by considering this kind of post-productivist theorizing in relation to Burlington County farming we begin to sort out where problems lie more generally in the current economic set-up and what residents would like to change in envisioning the future.

In nearly every interview during the research process, and certainly during many discussions at the forum, conversation falls on finance. This is predictable, perhaps, because today 'money' dominates economic discourse and today 'money' is where many respondents locate the powers that are driving design and development schemes in South Jersey. As educators and I analyze in dialogue the various ways in which local small-scale farms struggle to stay 'afloat,' we come across general local economic strategies that seem vital for modern day attentiveness to people, land, and community. This is not unusual. Certainly farmer and author Wendell Berry often makes reference to agriculturally-founded or agriculturally-relevant economic strategies that have the potential to work in all sorts of business situations to nurture local community and local connectedness to the land. In fact, Berry talks of discovering local economic strategies and eventually reworking total local economies in ways that give more power to people's affection for 'place' and less power to the 'abstract' of money.

In giving less power to money such reworking would also seem to give more power to the idea that 'less is more.' Many of my respondents indicate contempt for the local influences of what one respondent describes as "a consumer culture in the United States in which Americans settle for quantity over quality." Some educators describe an ideal economic situation in which people cared more about *being* and *experiencing* and less about

having (material goods). This sentiment is reiterated strongly at the community forum by at least a dozen of the 'audience' participant members as well as the breakout group leaders and forum speaker. Local resident-participants respond openly to the suggestion of keynote speaker Dr. Jerry Glover, that a radical re-thinking of economy may be just what is needed for the advancement of sustainable ways of life. Along these lines, South Jersey residents begin to recognize that many strategies of economic survival (which agricultural geographers would label as post-productivist) are not only important to the viability of small-scale farming but also, taken in a wider context, these strategies may allow for the kind of (hypothetical) repositioning of economy that would be fitting to a vision of a more 'caring' eco-social reality. Let us look now at some of the specifics of these economic strategies.

In describing the post-industrial, post-productivist economic strategies of family farming, geographers Brian Ilbery and Ian Bowler point out the need for family farms to undergo some sort of economic diversification. This may include members of the farming family taking non-farming jobs as well as the discovery of new ways to increase income from the farm business itself. In South Jersey, many educators and residents on some level have taken note of the ways that small-scale farms diversify. They frequently point to the example of farmers' markets in which they feel a 'sense of local interaction' is sold alongside fresh produce. In a similar vein they mention hay rides, animal petting, and other versions of agritourism, all common "Alternative Farm Enterprises" in South Jersey that have allowed family farms to survive. Furthermore, even those educators and residents who are not actively engaged with the local farming community are keen to point out various new routes that local small-scale farms *could* take to stay afloat. Such agricultural 'brainstorming' offers the South Jersey visioning process exceptional parallels to many of the currently fertile areas of research within agricultural geography. I find this to be true because local educators and residents (as a group) are aware of the multiple meanings and emotions (pride, fondness, nostalgia) that some people attach to the small-scale South Jersey farm. They are aware that agriculture and its seasonal round *can* offer a source of identity to local residents. They explain that such attachment of meanings and emotions could be used as 'leverage' on an economic front to encourage residents to buy local products and support local businesses.

There are a number of concrete ways to use meanings and emotions as ‘leverage.’ For example, educators suggest that local businesses place more emphasis on rural tourism, seasonal festivals, and seasonal cuisine or local eating. Educators envision these as possible ways to simultaneously help local farms financially and enhance a sense of localism or attentiveness to the local. Recall that according to a number of recent studies in rural and agricultural geography, such ‘visions’ are actually quite plausible. Specifically, papers like Roberta MacDonald and Lee Jolliffe’s “Cultural Rural Tourism” and Karen De Bres and James Davis’s “Celebrating Group and Place Identity” suggest that localized economic strategies that draw on meanings and emotions of ‘place’ can help to create genuine (i.e. not superficial or money-based) civic bonds and inspire attentiveness to local people, land, and community. Thus, South Jersey residents seem sensible in including these strategies as part of an overall vision for South Jersey that embodies an ethos of attentiveness to local uniqueness and ‘care’. Well beyond farming, South Jersey residents lead to the suggestion that a reorganization of many kinds of local business along such ‘post-productivist’ lines could help South Jersey to keep money/power in local hands and could help to rouse a communal sense of stewardship.

Yet, perhaps more important than consistent allusion to these specific diversification strategies during the visioning process are the ideas for further discussion that surface in many of my interviews and focus groups as well as at the community forum. Indeed, because the vision for South Jersey is a vision for change in *ethos*, we include ideas for new ways of thinking as well as new habits of action and new physical forms. South Jersey educators and residents come up with numerous ways to problematize the economic diversification strategies we discuss. They begin to look at how agriculture relates again to the ‘bigger picture’ both in and outside of the local area. They probe for reasons why such diversification strategies might fail or for reasons why they might be undesirable in South Jersey. In calling for others to do the same, they invite a vision of an economically analytical populace.

A clear, concrete example of such critical analysis manifests during conversation about local eating. There are a number of ways in which an emphasis on local eating

becomes complicated. First, more than one educator points to the issue of cost. Local eating is easier for those in the upper middle class who can afford to let emotions influence their food choices. Thus, the issue of class and accessibility enters into the picture. Also, accessibility to local food is quite dependent on the demands of one's lifestyle. Single parents, working parents, and 'overworked' individuals are less likely to have the time or make the effort to eat locally. This invites all kinds of questions in regard to general links between economy and quality of life in the modern day.

Secondly, there is the similarly complex issue of food marketing systems, which are currently set up so that local growers sell often to distant, non-local markets. As one area farmer explains, "Farmers today need a long marketing reach so as local people think 'local, local, local, growers think 'extend, extend, extend.'" Many respondents acknowledge that local selling and local buying can never be 100 percent "pure." They question, at what point, then, does a *cultural* emphasis on local eating become 'superficial,' 'tokenistic,' or 'meaningless'? Many assure me that this dilemma is thought about more broadly than it may seem in the county, and, although it can make 'sustainability' hard on one level, they explain that the very act of taking note of this local eating dilemma may have some value of its own. In fact, in a small informal meeting of farmers and educators, one local educator explains how understanding the complexity and incongruity of local eating could inspire even greater commitment to local attentiveness. He claims,

"People are beginning to feel that contradiction and are beginning to want to have that sip of local cranberry juice and think wow! That's the kind of consciousness that we want."

To be sure, not all educators share the view that such emotive, food-responsive, locally attentive consciousness is exactly 'what they want' in terms of transformation of ethos, but a majority of them do indicate that a good visionary plan for South Jersey would include some kind of consciousness shift in this direction. Such a change in ways of thinking would seem to go hand in hand with a 'caring' based re-evaluation of economics. People start to place other-than-material 'goods' higher up on a hierarchy of 'economic' value. Meanings, attachments, and emotions about the local become relevant to the world of economics, which is increasingly recognized as a realm much broader than 'finances'.

Indeed, over a dozen of interview respondents and forum participants explicitly articulate a vision for economy in South Jersey that would function under an ideology in which it is clearly not virtuous to place money at top value. In addition, over half of my respondents express the need for a “different philosophy of ownership” if we are to ever achieve ‘sustainability.’ The current philosophy, they say, is too individualistic, does not consider the ‘group,’ and is not compatible with a genuine concern for surrounding ‘others.’ Again, such an attitude echoes soundly at the forum. However, at the same time many interview respondents and forum participants see the necessity, in pragmatic, planning terms, in recognizing the difficulties and contradictions that are sometimes found when people today try to place other ‘goods’ above abstract money/material wealth in the economic hierarchy. Educators and forum participants thus articulate a vision for economy in South Jersey that keeps its roots in what is practical and conceivable. Still, overall this broader, expanded vision for an agriculturally-positioned economy, they indicate, is meant to make more room for particularities of place and thus more room for the attentiveness to people, land, and community upon which the entire visioning process has been founded.

An agriculturally positioned society

The final portion of this preliminary vision for South Jersey most directly tackles the question of social transformation. I question, what is seen as ‘amiss’ or ‘out of order’ in regard to the functioning of society in South Jersey that our local educational leadership and our forum resident-participants would like to work out? Undoubtedly there are many factors that would merit discussion here. I focus on three ideas in particular that surface frequently in agriculture-based dialogue and that together offer a strong visionary anchor around which to continue to build and fill in gaps. The first suggestion is the need for an increase in the activity of local institutions. This would include both the formation of new groups and clubs as well as the re-population and reinvigoration of already established associations. Over half of my respondents intimate that they are troubled by the lack of participation in such groups that they see in today’s society as compared to what they believe of the past. I sense that such frequent reference to an issue merits careful consideration and so I begin to probe

respondents more systematically in dialogue about this perceived lack of participation.

Again, I find particular ideas from within the already shared 'story' of agricultural geography quite helpful in thinking through this issue. The discussions on lack of participation call to mind the works of geographers John Jakle and Ian Bowler, both of whom define a local society's 'quality of life' in relation to residents' frequency of participation in social institutions and political involvement. In separate works, both geographers correlate this local participation to the 'Goldschmidt Hypothesis,' arguing that in rural agricultural areas, larger (more corporate, less human-scaled) agricultural landholdings seem to have an adverse effect on the active citizenship of local residents. Many of those involved with our local dialogue at its various stages apply this train of thought to the situation in South Jersey: Burlington County *has* lost smaller local landholdings to larger, more corporate, non-local ownership. This has happened within agriculture (i.e. the largest holder of agricultural land in Moorestown is now the national weapons manufacturer Lockheed Martin) and outside of agriculture (i.e. Wal-Mart's takeover of numerous municipal acres in Cinnaminson). In terms of creating an aura of locally attentive 'ownership' and 'stewardship,' such a loss certainly may have had a negative effect. Educators and residents concede that an ethos of committed attentiveness to 'place' does seem more strained today than in the past and are concerned that this has led to a decrease in civic participation. Yet, knowing this, it is suggested that we can use the 'theory' in the opposite direction. That is, attentiveness to people, land, and community, in general can emerge from consciously trying to populate and energize local social institutions. Furthermore, many local educators and residents agree that land-based or agriculture-based groups could be particularly important for the vision since they could allow for the specific integration of attentiveness to land-ecology into the social mix.

The second issue that local educators and forum participants bring up during the introductory visioning process is one that is quite connected to this idea of local participation. That is, many of my respondents make specific reference for the need for increased interaction among and between South Jersey's many varied communities. This has to do not so much with local institutions in particular but with the need for more forums and open spaces for dialogue between groups. Of course, since this is precisely the premise upon

which my dialogic research is based, I cannot imagine that I have not prompted this idea in at least a few of the interview sessions. However, because reference to the need for forums and increased dialogue often happens in the midst of discussion on person-specific concerns (i.e. recent municipal development decisions, troubles with produce marketing, targeted traffic congestion) I also must conclude that the desire to remedy this need is a 'real' one.

Furthermore, I also find it telling that when educators and residents describe the kinds of forums and spaces for open communication they desire, they include much more than simple 'town meetings' in their visions. More than a few of my respondents agree that there is a lack of "ritual" in modern society that allows for communal remembrance or celebration of the local people, land, community union. Although many others have not thought about this lack of ritual enough to be troubled by it, most of my respondents agree that the establishment of such ritual would be quite fitting for the vision of South Jersey we discuss. Of course, none are quite sure what such 'ritual' would look like. It has been talked about in mixed ways:

"I think a key [of cultural transformation] is making these communal activities [in which we] discuss our connection to the land and to community almost internal, a tradition, a ritual, so that the tradition itself becomes the identity and the tradition is tied to the land."

"Make a ritual, or put on a play"

"At festivals, [transformational activity] can be masqueraded as a party"

So, perhaps 'South Jersey ritual' would include elements of place-based storytelling or theatrical production that engages individuals with the community of surrounding 'others,' as various educators suggest. 'Entertainment' has been called for on numerous levels throughout dialogue. These envisioned 'ritual' events would go further than pure amusement to help announce and verify particular meanings and shared values. For instance, they might be used to re-give meaning to the common seasonal festival as not just a "day out" but as an activity that is identity building in itself and that enforces civic attentiveness to the local. All of my respondents recognize that the creation of such ritual takes time. Those who have included it in visioning suggest that ritual must first be intentional, and thus may seem contrived, but with time ritual grows richer and more meaningful to life in place. Along these lines, many forum participants viewed the forum day as an "intentional ritual" of sorts --

complete with a shared seasonal meal and communal walk -- and early feedback suggests that many participants hope for some substantial, long-term communal rituals to grow out of the forum event.

The final matter that educators and residents call attention to during the visioning process is the issue of modern society's impressive transience. In South Jersey, mobility is depicted as a 'double edged sword' and certainly, from the perspective of long-term residents, mobility can seem inherently opposed to any sort of meaningful attentiveness to local people, land, and community. In order for tradition to survive, for local uniquenesses to continue, and for *continuity* and other such local wisdom to exist it would seem that South Jersey needs individuals who are committed to living out their lives in the region. This line of thinking is inherent in the commentary I hear frequently that insists upon a need to 'teach' newcomers the local, true, or sincere ways of appreciating the area. Yet, while contemplating attentiveness to agriculture, a handful of my respondents come to the conclusion that learning to think and *feel* holistically about land and place in South Jersey does not portend a strict permanence of location. As one of my respondents puts it, "That kind of relationship to the land can be transplanted elsewhere." Thus, a vision of commitment to attentiveness to the whole of people, land, and community does not have to denote a life of commitment to one particular homeplace. Still, for maintenance of tradition, place-based knowledge, and continuity *anywhere* some level of intransience or stability seems essential. For this reason a few respondents suggest the creation of local educational alliances whose job it would be to engage with, communicate, and carry on local wisdom. At the forum, an emphasis on educational strategies to link local wisdom and ideas of wholeness with global learning (in grade-school, college, and non-formal type settings) is restated throughout the day. In this way, mobility need not be excluded from the vision for South Jersey; it simply must be treated with caution.

Beyond these three concise attempts to delineate a vision from agriculture-based dialogue with Burlington County educators and forum participants, I could offer many additional submissions for South Jersey's forward progression. There could be much more to an agriculturally-positioned economy, environment, and society in South Jersey. Yet, the site

for that continued discussion is now South Jersey itself – specifically the varied ‘classrooms’ into which Burlington County educators choose to carry on the dialogue. Of course, it would be poor community planning to drop this small, introductory vision on the identified educational leadership and walk away. Thus, part of my dialogic research in Burlington County also deals with coming up with strategies for action. The plan of action that ensues is preliminary and, again, necessarily non-comprehensive. Still, it offers some groundwork for continued community work in South Jersey.

Realizing the Vision

By now it should be quite obvious that the primary way I propose to advance the process of ethos change or cultural transformation is through dialogue. As I express this in interviews and during the community forum I find that all of my respondents believe there to be important ways forward to be found in the action of dialogue itself. As we search together for ways to continue with the idea of "re-connecting our lives to the land," dialogue – and specifically a dialogue oriented towards the wholeness of agriculture – is a central component of the action plan. All of us imagine that the passing on of such culturally-reflective dialogue can happen in multiple settings, from family dinner conversation and local coffeehouse chatter to town gatherings and municipal planning meetings.

Of course, this dialogue can also continue in the various ‘educational settings’ in which many of my respondents work. Many formal educators in Burlington County already claim to use dialogue as a “teaching style.” Some choose to emphasize dialogue (instead of lecture) because it is in dialogue, they say, that students can really can be pressed to think critically or “think outside the box,” as one educator puts it. In regard to using a focus on agriculture in dialogue to encourage systems thinking, more than half see this as a “legitimate” choice of focus and certainly viable *if* educators themselves become sensitive to the holism agriculture can allow. One BCC sociology professor responds,

In terms of educators themselves seeing the interconnectedness of human communities ecology, and issues of farming and food, the challenge is to not divide thinking and teaching so strongly into separate issues (one species lost, one lake polluted) but [instead to see] such particular events as being interconnected with and

affecting or needing to affect people's decisions in life. Really, this is a major part of the fight against the loss of ecology and community here (Professor of Sociology 2004).

Hence, speaking practically for the future of South Jersey there does seem to be a core of educational leaders who are interested in the idea of advancing a holistic 'civic agriculture' dialogue together and who are open to learning from each other as they negotiate the how's what's and why's of the dialogue. Furthermore, the fact that the January 8 community forum, with a "critical mass" of people and things, was able to present the idea of wholeness quite effectively, seemed to solidify the fact that agri-cultural dialogue is a legitimate and pragmatic way to move forward with plans for stewardship and sustainability in this local area.

Thus, the primary plan of action for the continued negotiation of a South Jersey vision for re-connecting to the land and for advancing the 'civic potentials' of agriculture is a plan of active dialogue. As one Burlington County College educator explains, if we want to witness the beginnings of this vision, we have to consistently supply "little ripples to make bigger effects" (Professor of Sociology 2004). Another non-formal educator echoes this guidance saying, "In terms of being educational in that [holistic] way, I think we just need to keep saying it over and over, again and again, and in every corner, all over the county" (Coordinator, BCFF 2004). Yet, most respondents advising on the continuation of the idea to re-connect culturally to the land also see it as a pressing need to come up with ways of proceeding that are *task specific*, so that those who want to participate but are unsure or apprehensive of their contribution can come slowly to a "deep-dialogue based" or "life-oriented" understanding of the vision. Thus, the following sections detail the concrete ideas for action that South Jersey educators and residents collectively offer.

Re-working what is already in place

In a sense, this section can be seen as a cultural inventory of sorts. In community planning, cultural inventories are considered one of the first and most crucial steps to the 'development' process, particularly to Community Economic Development. What makes this inventory different from most is that the "community" and its "culture" are not readily identifiable in Burlington County. Still, knowing the kind of cultural transformation that

many local educators and residents have envisioned, it is possible to take account of the courses, programs, events, and other activities already in effect in the county that have the potential to be *re-worked* to include and improve upon our agricultural dialogue on wholeness and reconnection to the land. I emphasize 're-worked' because currently, not many of these courses, programs and events seem to convey an understanding of the wholeness of agriculture that I have tried to impart with dialogic methods of deconstruction and cultural reflection.

In terms of Burlington County non-formal educative activities, special mention must be made of the potentially valuable resource of the Burlington County Parks Department and particularly their Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs. Recently, the division hired a planning consultant to come up with the "Burlington County Cultural Plan for 2001-2005." Although nowhere in the plan is agriculture explicitly mentioned, the objectives of the Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs in other ways parallel our dialogue of 'civic agriculture' or 'reconnecting lives to the land'. The cultural plan begins with the assumption that Burlington County does, indeed, need to "enliven [its] communities," and it proposes that the county use cultural organizations to accomplish this. As a start, the plan suggests that people in the county begin "networking" and it lists a central objective of "facilitating an ongoing dialogue among cultural organizations, individuals, and community based organizations to examine community challenges and opportunities." Thus, inasmuch as the Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs can come to see agriculture as a cultural institution of sorts, the division could prove a positive source for the reinforcement and further development and advancement of the dialogue. In addition, the division's Cultural Plan shares with this preliminary plan for South Jersey the acknowledgement that there is a need for "'awareness education' for all educators," taking a multi-disciplinary approach and providing sort-of "how-to" to clarify the integration of culture (or *agri-culture*) into diverse content areas (Cavanaugh 2001).

It may also be telling that the Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs has recently begun to plan an art exhibit of works of local artists on the theme of farming. While the division's current administrative staff does not seem to be immediately sensitive to a holistic

treatment of agriculture in the cultural realm, their desire to spread attentiveness to local artistry through the theme of agriculture would suggest a movement in this direction. Additionally significant may be the recent increase in the general budget of the Burlington County Parks Department. As one non-formal educator explains,

The Parks Department is increasing its activity – sponsoring awareness campaigns, offering fully-paid-for activities like the Fall Float Festival – because the county government is detecting a need for environmental connections. County residents want this (Director of Programming, Whitesbog 2004).

Surely, if it is true that Burlington County residents have begun to ask for more ways of connecting to the land and to each other, then the increasing “overcrowding” seen at events like the Whitesbog Blueberry Festival and the Burlington County Farm Fair should be no surprise. The Farm Fair and Blueberry Festival at Whitesbog are just two of dozens of events that seem to hold some potential for the advancement of an agriculture-based community dialogue on wholeness. (See table 4.1 for a more complete register of relevant events or groups). At first, as a researcher I was skeptical as to the capacity of such events to embrace the holistic vision of agricultural dialogue that I discern. To the ‘participant observer’ they do seem, as a number of my respondents inform, more about simply ‘getting out of the house’ than about communal celebration of something particularly *local* of shared value. However, after looking more closely into the *objectives* of the events, including introducing the event organizers to the idea of reconnecting to the land by means of the ‘civic agriculture’ flyer, I find my initial perceptions somewhat unjustified. Particularly in regard to the farm fair I find that event coordinators are often looking for ways to give fairs or programs more of the kind of “substance” that they detect in the civic agriculture questions, but that they often lack time, enterprise, or means to do so. Thus, we can view these kinds of events as potential untapped resources.

Beyond these seasonal fairs, festivals, and county-wide events (often organized or co-sponsored by county officials) there are numerous other resources in the Burlington County

Table 4.1
Burlington County Resources for Dialogue

Potential Resources for the Advancement of Dialogue in Burlington County		
Resource	Group	Summary
Pinelands Short Course	BCC non-credit offerings	course offered as education for educators interested in Pinelands ecology, history, and culture
PINES program	BCC at Whitesbog	Pinelands Institute for Natural & Environmental Studies -- the institute's written mission is "To provide opportunities for people to be immersed in local habitats, to foster awareness of all living things within those habitats and to help people discover their past and present connection to the land."
Nature outreach activities open to public	Pinelands Preservation Alliance	offers outreach programs and resources for people to engage with nature and experience sensorial connection with the local natural environment.
Ag. activities open to public	Numerous local family-run farms	many local farms offer public activities for increasing interaction with and knowledge of local farming including: Hunter's Farm, The Johnson Farmstead, The Taylor Farm
Leadership Development Program	NJ Agricultural Society	program designed for farmers to develop skills in communication, public speaking, conflict resolution and negotiation as well as general analytical skills related to agricultural systems thinking
Ag. and grower programs	Burl. Co. Rutgers Cooperative Ext.	provides educational programs to consumers, homemakers, homeowners, farmers, growers, and youth
Burl. Co. Farm Fair	Fair Organizing Committee	though marketed as simple agri-tourism, the fair's current organizing committee is committed to finding new ways to increase cultural attentiveness to agriculture and agricultural systems as they relate to the wider eco- and social-scapes
Whitesbog Preservation Trust		A historically, agriculturally, and ecologically relevant site, open daily for visits. Also offers a seasonal round of festivals, walks and educational talks open to the public for a small fee.
Local Historical Societies		dedicated to preserving, cataloguing and displaying the history of Burlington County as a unique place.
Pinelands Commission		a government appointed commission responsible for caring for the natural and cultural resources of the Pinelands National Reserve, and encouraging compatible economic and other human activities consistent with that purpose

area that could be used in the advancement of the dialogue on wholeness here. These include the local farms and farm markets themselves, in which a variety of attempts at outreach can be found, as well as special-interest groups like the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, the Pinelands Commission, local Historical Societies, and even local libraries. This latter suggestion of local libraries comes from several of my respondents. Even though the activity

of reading alone may not be sufficient to sustain widespread cultural transformation, the promotion of attentiveness to local people, land, and community through reading has already succeeded on a small scale in South Jersey. This fact is explained to me the Director of Outreach at the Pinelands Commission who acknowledges a definitive increase in interest in the Pine Barrens since novelist John McPhee's acclaimed book *The Pine Barrens* was awarded the 2004 book of the year in the recently established "One book for New Jersey" Campaign. The campaign is designed to bring together New Jersey citizens through reading and in the case of the 2004 book choice, the campaign "really seemed to make a difference." The Director of Outreach explains that the book brought North Jerseyans down to Burlington County to "discover what they had been missing" and this, in turn, inspired increased local appreciation of the place. "If outsiders show appreciation for these lands, then [the local residents] begin to see this as an important place." He suggests that if more books incorporating local people, land, and community were chosen in future years, we could see similar effects (Director of Outreach, PC 2004).

Paying attention to the effect of literature and libraries draws us closer to the realm of formal education. To be sure, Burlington County Community College, with its numerous campuses, library collections on local peoples and places, and extensive credit and non-credit course offerings, is a valuable resource for an initiative directed towards community education. Yet, to consider the college a central institution from which to advance an agriculture-based dialogue aimed at increasing attentiveness to local people, land, and community, brings up some doubts with local educators. First, many agree that the county did not make a good choice by putting the main campus in Pemberton, far to the east in the county and surrounded by Pinelands forest. As a county, *community* institution, many feel that the placement should have been more central.

Moreover, in the beginning decades of its history, the institutional cultural tone of BCC, if there was one, was not *local* at all. Older faculty members explain that in the beginning days most faculty and staff moved in from out of state and did not live in the older communities, the small towns of Burlington County. In first five years of the college "not even ten local people could be found working here," claims one long-term employee. The

college workforce came in from the outside with the “people who were changing the landscape” and there was “a lot of resentment” from old-time area residents. Now faculty members maintain that the *local* can be read a bit better within the institutional culture. Many give credit to the current present whom they say “made a good effort by moving to the county seat and by consistently walking the town in order to be known as a neighbor, a local figure.” This is important for the college reputation as a central community institution (Director of Libraries 2004, Professor of Sociology 2004).

Still today, in terms of its proposed portrayal as a central place for the nurturing and advancement of an agriculture-based dialogue on wholeness, the institution of Burlington County College has room for improvement. For one, in regard to aura, ethos, or institutional culture, the county college presents itself primarily as economic; recent marketing brochures focus on BCC’s financial or monetary impact on the region and say nothing of connectedness to local land. Even the land upon which the college campuses are built seems largely ignored. In fact, nearly all of the educators whom I interview, are unaware that the college’s two largest campuses were both built on agricultural land. The Mount Laurel Campus’s new Enterprise Center has a pavilion that boasts the name of the sweet corn, vegetable, and grape farmer who cultivated that land. Yet, the majority of faculty, staff, and students do not know this reason behind the naming of the “Votta” Pavilion. Similarly, only a handful of employees realize that the entire Pemberton campus was built upon land once cultivated by the family of (their very own) BCC Library Director, a long-term county resident.

Along these lines, a number of faculty members come to propose that Burlington County College continue to work on its ‘local’ image. One professor comments, “BCC is connected, maybe, to the ‘community’ in different external ways – our courses, our swimming pool – but it misses the other part of the whole, the connection to the land.” In that respect, another professor muses, maybe the (rural) location of the main Pemberton Campus is a plus:

Today, people are having to learn to tuck themselves into ecological systems better. To have a campus right on the edge of a preserve in the midst of this [Baltimore, Boston Philadelphia, New York] megalopolis could be beneficial for the start of systems and ecological thinking and holistic agricultural understanding. (Philosophy

Professor 2004)

Indeed, although the county college is ‘not there yet,’ there are conclusive signs that the overall ethos of the institution is moving in a direction that could benefit a local renewal of the idea of wholeness. An area farmer and long-time BCC board member comments,

Even though [the kind of holistic attentiveness] shown in the civic agriculture questions is not part of the institutional culture of the community college yet, that doesn’t mean it cannot change. . . It could be an important part of the legacy that [this generation of educators] leaves for the county community college. (Cranberry Farmer 2004)

Thus, many of our educational leadership – administrators, board members, professors, and farmers included – find that with continued attentiveness and work Burlington County College *can* fit with the vision for attentiveness to people, land, and community that has been put forth in this thesis. This verdict is crucial for the practicality of my dialogic research – its ability to produce tangible results.

Having recognized this potential compatibility, my respondents and I also begin to inventory the various individual assets, courses, programs, and events available at BCC that could be tapped as parts of an overall attempt to provide some task-specific elements to the strategic advancement of the civic agriculture dialogue. To start, we can address the specific academic departments as potential resources. Undoubtedly, the discussions of the concept of “agriculture across the curriculum” allow each discipline some internal searching to come up with ways in which they address the eco-social issues of the local area. The Biology department explains its offerings of ecology classes in which students learn about area ecology through local examples including field trips to Pinelands and agricultural sites. One biology professor explains how she takes her general biology class out at the end of the semester for a walk around the campus:

We go over to the retention pond right off the parking lot. There are red-winged blackbirds there all the time. I bring students there and most of them say they never noticed the birds despite parking in the lot every day. Also, there we can see a handful of ground hogs with five to seven dens. People are astounded these dens are there. My students stay in their cars and don’t see or don’t want to see anything on land. The more you bring it to them the better. (Professor of Environmental Science 2004).

Many of the departments in the Social Sciences and Humanities also describe more subtle ways in which they connect to discussions of the local people-land-community union.

Particularly notable is one sociology professor's idea of "Authentic Learning," a concept which she sees as highly relevant to the struggle for attentiveness to land and community through learning about agriculture. "Authentic Learning" as this professor explains it, is premised on "making a connection with the classroom and the surrounding world," on not having learning be 'abstract.' Accordingly, activities of "authentic learning" involve critical investigation of local eco-social issues such as development disputes or pollution concerns. These activities are designed to get students to connect academic theory to the 'real' world and to reflect upon their place in the broader scheme of what they are learning. In that way this educational concept offers a decent parallel to the push of this thesis for strategies of critical, systems thinking (Professor of Sociology 2004).

I could list a variety of other educational concepts, tools, and approaches used by educators at Burlington County College that correspond just as adequately. On this level, BCC as a resource seems exceptional. I come across professors from all departments in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities who are eager to search for additional ways in which their work can be relevant. What's more, even those professors who lack the time or inspiration to design a specific task to implement in the classroom have said that they willing to try to implement suggestions that others come up with during the course of dialogue both prior to and during the January 8 community forum. Along similar lines, directors or moderators of clubs, student activities, and other divisions like the Burlington County College Radio, have begun to brainstorm task specific actions their divisions can take on as part of the advancement of the dialogue and the search for routes to cultural transformation within and outside of the institution. (See table 4.2 for the full record of these proposals).

A model: the January 8 community forum

Of course, during the months of research and participation leading up to the January 8 community forum, part of the work of South Jersey educators was directed towards specialized event planning. The following section details parts of the forum planning process as well as the forum itself and attempts to encapsulate the specific strategies for advancement and further dialogue that arise in this context. I offer the example of the forum event here as a flexible and unfinished model for the creation of future, transformational community

events.

As I mentioned previously, I initiated the idea for a community forum early on in the interview stage of my research as part of a strategic attempt to give structure, substance, and some sense of ‘tangibility’ to my ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue. However, since these beginning stages I made it clear to interested educators that my role in the forum would be partial; I would not take a leadership role, but was willing to participate as part of a planning team. It was not to be ‘my’ forum, but ‘theirs’ – the organizers and the residents who came to participate on January 8. Thus, while I was willing to help with logistical concerns and to give suggestions as to the structuring of the day, I wanted the conversations – the community dialogue – to flow from them, in

Table 4.2
New Land-based Ideas for BCC

New Ideas for Community Education through B.C.C.

- English Department – plans to offer a literature or writing assignment that asks students to address either the issue of cultural reflections on ‘place’ or attentiveness to land and seasonal cycles.
- Agricultural Programming – B.C.C looks to develop a new program (major) in agriculture (perhaps landscape-oriented) and will consider integrating pragmatic eco-systemic thinking into the curriculum.
- G.I.S. Program – geology and geography professors suggest a program mingling current enthusiasm for computer technologies like Geographic Informations Systems and Geographic Positioning with agricultural sustainability and sustainability through agriculture.
- Local History Programming – some B.C.C professors have suggested the implementation of programs that teach local county history and historical preservation (a handful of other NJ counties already have such programs in place)
- Other Local Programming – other professors suggest general place-based course offerings on issues of local ecology, society, town planning, and arts.
- Food Services – food services at B.C.C. currently do not allow for any level of local eating, eliminating county growers from their list of potential distributors. However, this inconsistency has been noted and should be addressed.
- Service Based Programs – ideas for service through the Student Government Association include agricultural volunteer work, the implementation of community gardens, and the planting of roadway medium strips with crop-producing plants as part of ‘adopt a highway.’
- Public Service Announcements – B.C.C radio operations manager suggests the radio waves as a means of advancing dialogue and encouraging participation in future planned Civic Agriculture events, such as the forum on Burlington County Culture and Agriculture.
- Fun Fest – B.C.C. student activities coordinator suggests the slow introduction of agriculture-based or seasonal themes to this day-long fair that takes place every year in May on the Pemberton Campus. The Fun Fest has been done for sixteen years and is the main single event, thus far at B.C.C. that works to bring the college together with the outside community.

whatever ways they desired. As interest in the idea of the community forum grew, an organizing committee for the event began to form, and the members were set by the end of the summer of 2004 (the end of the interview stage of my research). The committee consisted of three professors (one in social sciences/humanities and two in natural sciences) one local cranberry farmer, one non-formal Pinelands educator, and one public relations expert. Because I was not set to stay in New Jersey during the fall, it was decided that I would participate through email and telephone when they requested.

Because of the obvious parallels with my research, my research ideas were used heavily as a springboard for the planning of the forum event. In accordance with the dialogue-based research of this thesis, the community forum was designed to maintain a focus on farmers and educators and dealt directly with the idea of cultural transformation or change in ethos. However, the gathering was to go beyond the scope of my individual project as it was envisioned as a chance for all South Jersey residents – farmers, educators, landowners, business people, planners, naturalists, politicians, students and others – to come together to connect with each other and the land in new ways. As was written in the forum’s original promotional brochure, the forum was meant to set forth a local attempt to answer the imminent question, “How can we experience a 21st Century rebirth as a place?” During the autumn of 2004, the forum planning committee set out planning the logistics of how to bring this open-ended question into action on the community level.

Of course, some details of the forum event were decided upon while I was still in the midst of my interview stage, and thus still focusing on the forum as a strategic way to offer structure to the dialogue. For example, because my dialogic research in South Jersey began with highlighting Burlington County as a focal area of South Jersey in need of an active, environmentally attentive community and Burlington Community College as the primary institution of higher, community education in this area, the placement of the resultant community forum at the main campus of the Burlington County College seemed logical. The campus is located in Pemberton, New Jersey within the boundaries of the agriculturally-contested^b New Jersey Pine Barrens. The placement, then, allowed some physical substance

^b As noted earlier, agriculture is a much contested land use in the Pine Barrens, especially in key ecological areas of the reserve.

to the title of the forum that a few educators and I settled on upon early on – *Burlington County Culture and Agriculture: Re-connecting our lives to the land.*

Also early on in my interview research, educators interested in the forum had begun to offer many ideas for specific topics of discussion during the event. The ideas from the ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue were drawn upon heavily. However, beyond the topics of the original civic agriculture flyer, the educators discussed town planning and the issue of the “rateables chase,” which some saw as a compelling reason why undesirable forms of development still continue in the county. Some suggested using culture and agriculture to analyze New Jersey’s Smart Growth model. Others petitioned that forum participants tackle the need to make it easier for young people to enter the farming business. This way, Burlington County could move beyond just *preserving* farmland to *advancing* the actual industry. One educator went on to reason that dialogue on this topic could help to uphold the local knowledge and skills that were once held by county agriculturists but that are now being lost. Finally, other educators brought up the idea that including the issue of food security – the strategic importance of having local food sources and a local base of fertile agricultural land – could be advantageous in terms of the ‘energy’ of the forum because it is currently an emotionally charged topic.

From these deliberations I developed five tentative topics, or lines of questioning, that I presented to the forum committee to be used in facilitating the breakout groups. A number of these topics were markedly similar to the original ‘civic agriculture’ questions. After some discussion the committee agreed on the following five topics:

1. Seasonal Awareness: How do we evaluate our agriculture-based festivals and other such events in terms of their civic educational potential?
2. Farming in the Suburbs: In an environment of rapid landscape change, how can we re-connect with the civic importance of agriculture?
3. Agriculture across the Curriculum: In literature, philosophy, economics, etc., how might land and farmers re-emerge as central to our 21st Century culture?
4. Eating as an Agricultural Act: How can we support sustainable local food systems in our region? How important is ‘organic’ here?
5. Food Security: In the tradition of World War II victory gardens, how might local agriculture be central to security in a post 9/11 era?

Beyond these five topics identified during my initial interview stage, I also encountered another pressing theme that many of my respondents saw as both literally and metaphorically vital. This was the theme of soil. Many of the educators interested in the forum identified attentiveness to soil as acutely important:

Soil is very important, the so-called link between the organic and inorganic worlds; it would be essential to have someone knowledgeable about soil at the forum (Assistant Professor of Geology 2004).

Look at Larchmont [New Jersey]. That was once our prime agricultural soil in the county; now it's concrete (Director of Libraries 2004).

People here do not realize that good agricultural soil – the texture, the nutrient load, the mixture of particle sizes – takes thousands of years to form, and that once we build on it, it is ruined. We cannot have it back, even if we remove the development (Professor of Biology 2004).

Soil is a place for roots, it is homeland, and a foundation. It is a place of fertility, of growth, and of production. It is also the medium through which nutrients, energy, life and death cycles. Moreover, it is irreplaceable in the short term and thus requires stewardship, systems-thinking, and an eye to future generations.

I shared these insights regarding the prominent theme of soil with the entire forum committee, once it had been formed at the end of the summer. Because of this recognized significance, the forum committee decided to ratify an early suggestion (of a few) that among a modest group from which to select a keynote speaker for the forum – someone to inspire and tie the topic together – the soil scientist seemed promising. Thus, Dr. Jerry Glover, a non-local agro-ecologist and soil specialist from the Land Institute in Salina, Kansas, was designated as the speaker for the Culture and Agriculture forum of 2005. Dr. Glover was particularly fitting as a key-note 'outsider' given that the stated mission of the Land Institute reads as follows:

“When people, land, and community are as one, all three members prosper; when they relate not as members but as competing interests, all three are exploited. By consulting Nature as the source and measure of that membership, The Land Institute seeks to develop an agriculture that will save soil from being lost or poisoned while promoting a community life at once prosperous and enduring.” (The Land Institute 2004).

The 2005 forum committee agreed that this written mission of the Land Institute

paralleled their unspoken mission for the forum event. After deciding on a speaker and identifying ‘soil’ as a way to come back to the central question of creating a ‘prosperous’ and ‘enduring’ community life, the committee set up to deal with the objective of cultural transformation. As with my own dialogic research, not only was the forum conceived as an event where visions and ideas for the transformation of local ethos are discussed, but it was also meant to be an event that was identity building and culturally *productive* in itself. Along these lines the organizing committee determined to try to include seasonal ritual as part of the forum. They envisioned including such ‘intentional’ ritual at, as a minimum, two particular times during the day.^c The first emphasized ritual time was to occur at lunch, when the gathered South Jersey citizens come together for a shared meal, which would hopefully include locally grown foods. The second marked time was to occur at the end of the day when participants were to be welcomed on an optional trip to Whitesbog Village (a historical site of berry cultivation) for a walk around the flooded cranberry bogs. This walk was planned knowing that the January date of the event coincided with the time of year in which the tundra swans stop at Whitesbog during their winter migration route. The shared walk was planned in an effort to allow participants to experience a communal avowal of physical, sensory, bodily re-connection with the land and each other. Perhaps it would end, they mused, with an informal gathering at the Whitesbog general store where walkers could share hot cranberry cider.

Of course, cider, along with a shared meal, a space well equipped for gathering, and flyers, invitations, and other necessary means of publicity all have a price tag. The forum was envisioned as an event open to *everyone* in the regional area, and thus, it would seem to make sense if it were offered free of charge. However, the cost had to be carried by someone. Indeed, it would be unfair to discuss the forum without mentioning the central role played by the Burlington County Community College in funding the event. BCC provided not only the space for the event, but various divisions of the college also fronted the costs for the flyers and advertisements, the audio-visual setup, a travel stipend for the keynote speaker, some of the food, and all of the food preparation. (See appendix 9 for an explanation of event

^c Although ‘ritual’ was emphasized these two times, a number of participants have commented that the whole day, and not just these two particular moments, felt much like a ritual of sorts.

advertising). The rest was covered by donations and volunteers; a variety of regional farms donated locally-grown, seasonally available produce, while the organizing committee and a few others volunteered their time and efforts.

What BCC got out of its almost single-handed funding of the January 8 community forum, was a new, special kind of recognition. Indeed, by calling regional residents to gather at the BCC main campus, and by stamping the flyers with the BCC emblem, the event advertising marked the forum as a “BCC event.” Yet on the actual day, January 8th, it became clear that the forum was very different from other county college events with which area residents might have been familiar. This feeling of ‘difference’, or of being involved in something ‘different,’ came from the explicit message, offered early on, that the forum was the result of much influence from outside of the (traditional) institutional boundaries of the county college. That is, although most of the organizing committee was affiliated in one way or another with BCC, the group had been forged outside of the conventional means in which the institution operates and many of the *ideas* of the forum expanded beyond institutional boundaries as well. When the BCC vice president offered his welcoming remarks at the start of the day on January 8, he made clear that the forum had been organized in a more grass-roots, activist sort of way and that BCC was both appreciative and fully open to this.

After the welcoming remarks from BCC administration, students, and faculty, the forum began with a theme-setting speech, which I wrote with collaboration and feedback from others, and which I offered to give as my service to the day. (See appendix 6 for a copy of the theme-setting speech given at the opening to the forum). The speech was followed by a panel discussion in which six panelists, of varied occupations, offered their ad hoc responses to the speech and to each other’s commentary. (See appendix 7a for program of events with list of panel members). Before dividing for the (previously mentioned) break-out group sessions (led by a combination of panel members and organizing committee volunteers) the entire gathered group was given an open floor to ask questions and make comments that arose as they listened to the panel discussion. This “open floor” time was perhaps one of the most fruitful parts of the day in regard to my research call to see the issue of agriculture and land from “all sides at once.” Indeed, here we witnessed a number of

dissimilar individuals offering diverse opinions and remarks in response to the general idea of “re-connecting our lives to the land.” We had the self-identified progressive Roman Catholic and the conservative religious right, the struggling horse farmer and the concerned college student, the electrician and the architect, all side-by-side bringing up points that the others may not have otherwise considered.

After many voices were heard, both here on the “open floor” and in the five break-out group sessions, the gathered group reconvened to first, share their lessons from the small groups and, second, to share a luncheon meal of turkey and a variety of seasonal dishes made with locally-grown produce. As the group finished their cobbler desserts, they listened to the address of keynote speaker, Dr. Jerry Glover, who talked on the complex problems of soil, sustainable agriculture, and connectedness to the land. Near the end of the talk, the assembled local residents and forum planning committee were granted a surprise visit from a small regional dairy farm, that had been alerted about the forum by one of the event panel members. The representing dairy farmer, who had recently established the farm, offered samples of cheese as forum participants gathered their belongings to either head home, or to head to Whitesbog for the shared “winter tundra swan walk” around the nearly-frozen cranberry bogs. With this second ritual event, the January 8 community forum came to a close. Participants left the BCC campus that afternoon more prepared than they had been a few hours before to carry on a ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue in other parts of their lives.

After the event, both the feedback from forum participants and the initial response from other local residents (who had not attended but who had heard details of the event) was positive. Of course, this does not mean that event was perfect as a model for community dialogue, just that the day did seem to accomplish *something*. The forum organizing committee highlights two details in regard to community feedback that seem to be of particular importance: First, is the point that the forum seems to have been recognized as, notably, an act of love. That is, it has been noted by participants and other local residents that the event planning was accomplished out of a number of ‘loves’ of the organizing committee: a love of place, a love of people, a love of land, a love of ecology, a love of education, a love of dialogue, and probably many more, unnamed. This fact was made clear on January 8,

during the opening statement given by the forum committee spokesperson, who emphasized the devotion of the organizing group:

“Today’s forum is just a small beginning, and I want to stress that the day was put together by amateurs. That is not to say that we are not professional; many of us here today are very professional at what we do. I mean that we are amateurs in the sense of the Latin word, *amare*, which means ‘love.’ We did this out of love for it.”

This opening remark, and the spreading recognition of it seems to have been important because it has spurred other individuals around the county to begin to recognize their own affections for local people, land, and community. Many have offered written or spoken thanks in regard to the “sense of inspiration” that they felt as a result of the forum’s open call to include love or affection in dialogue on issues of land and agriculture. Furthermore, already a handful of individuals have turned affection into action, and have begun to plan further programs on issues of agriculture and re-connection to the land for the local area. These include a possible new horticulture or agriculture program to be run at Burlington County College, a new course on regional land and development to be taught at a local high school, a new ‘listserv’ to be compiled from the forum participant register and a growing list of interested others, and a new on-line address to locate our growing community dialogue: “civicagriculture@bcc.edu.” (See appendix 8 for greater detail of these new educational programs inspired by the community forum). Also, preliminary feedback suggests that the “word” has spread rather quickly to area farmers, a great number of whom were unable to attend the event as a result of prior commitments and an obligation to attend the funeral of a member of their local community. Indeed, an increasing number of farmers, upon hearing accounts from the day, have asked to be included on a ‘list’ of those interested in any follow-up action to the forum. (Still, many remark that it will always be hard to achieve great attendance from farmers as a result of busy winter scheduling and the difficulty of leaving the farm during the growing and harvesting seasons.)

The second detail that the forum committee has highlighted in regard to community feedback from the forum is the fact that it also seems to have been recognized as an act of “wholeness.” That is, the concept of “wholeness,” and its inherent correlation with the idea of “re-connecting to the land” has been taken in and followed by members of the South Jersey community. During the forum, the point of wholeness was offered as an ‘alternative’ to not

only ecological but also social divisions. The organizing committee spokesperson explained,

“A lot of people have asked, ‘What kind of gathering is this?’ First, I want to say, this gathering is future-oriented -- it is not about the past, not nostalgic. Furthermore, this is not a gathering of any group; it is not a gathering of farmers; it is not a gathering of environmentalists; it is not a gathering of educators, or of any other one group. I might ask, ‘Do you eat?’ Then you belong here. Do you dwell?’ You belong here. This is a gathering about community, about place . . . in a word, it is really about wholeness.”

Indeed, the need to include *all* voices was stressed quite firmly at the forum; if a dialogue is to be “whole,” in any sense of the word, it must actively seek out ways to be inclusive. Early participant feedback suggests that by stressing this point of “wholeness” as, in part, an issue of social *inclusion*, the leaders of the forum day were able to first, prompt a sense of belonging in individuals from divergent groups and second, leave them with a sense of responsibility for land and place.

That said, I would like to dwell for a moment on the social inclusion or diversity that was actually accomplished at the event. The forum committee is well aware that although they might have attracted a much more diverse group of dialogue participants than I did during the interview stage of my research, they were unable to attract “everyone” to the forum event. We might start by examining the hundred-some gathered participants in terms of the common social divisions of race and class: In terms of class-based distinctions, the event was able to attract a number of students and ‘working class’ residents, and thus achieved a greater diversity than my original interview set. In terms of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity, the participant group was fairly well mixed, but still not to the ‘appropriate’ proportions that might be suggested by county demographic statistics.

The acknowledgement of these limitations in diversity may be important, but in one sense they miss a crucial point. There seems to have been a more significant absence at the forum, which becomes obscured when we look at diversity only in racial and class terms. Indeed, there do seem to have been certain ‘groups’ of society missing, whose membership cannot be defined by (and may cut across) racial and economic barriers. These groups are

unnamed, or at least hard to name; we might attempt to label one as the ‘pre-occupied-with-technology’ group and another as the ‘pre-occupied-with-economy-for-economy’s-sake’ group. Yet, these labels are vague and imbalanced, and they leave many more groups unnamed. The point here is not so much to come up with a label but to recognize that there may be certain ‘types’ – certain individuals associated with certain ‘lifestyle-choices’ – who were entirely missing from the gathered group of forum participants, and who were missing specifically because they self-identify as ‘types’ who are not interested in “that sort of thing.” Of course, this is a difficult point to make for the very reason that, unlike the groupings of race and class, these groups are fragmented, hybrid, and have not been specified academically in social science literature. However, they might be seen as part of a growing “mosaic culture” in the United States, that divides itself more often along lines of age, occupation, interests, and lifestyle than it does along the traditional lines of race, class, gender, and religion (Hollands 2002, MacRae 2004, Anthias 1999, and de Blij 2003). In this way, the noted deficiencies in diversity from the January 8 forum make clear that in order for a ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue to be “whole” it must find ways of blending these new ‘mosaic’ social groupings.

Conclusions

My empirical research in Burlington County has focused on dialogic strategies, using the concept of “wholeness” in agriculture to enliven a visioning process for local cultural transformation and community planning. I identified formal and non-formal educators as a qualified subset of local leaders and decision makers whose perceptions of local people, land, and community are particularly germane given that this thesis examines a *pedagogical* approach to community development. Throughout this work I tried to maintain a certain reflexivity in terms of my own dialogic strategy as I worked, first in detail with local Burlington County educators and later in a different way with local residents at the

community forum, to come up with an agriculturally-founded vision for transforming ‘ethos’ in South Jersey. This reflexivity has allowed me to question the practicality of using a holistic focus on agriculture as a medium through which to engage local people in deliberate, culturally productive activity – activity in which they begin to mutually “rename [their] world through dialogue” (Wilson 1996, 7). In this way I have searched to reply to the central question of this thesis: To what practical extent do South Jersey educators find legitimacy with the suggestion that we can use local agriculture as a foundation for deepening our sense of place and stewardship? Of course, I answer this question not with a quantitative statement to satisfy the exact degree, but with detailed, descriptive analysis of the vision, strategies, and dilemmas that we encounter in agriculture-based dialogue. The practicality of my suggestion is revealed by the ways in which both Burlington County educators and community forum participants have taken the idea of wholeness forward.

I have explicitly stated that the intention behind the dialogue that I establish in Burlington County is the creation of a more ecologically and socially *conscious* and more ecologically and socially *active* local citizenry. To-date, as my own empirical research activities in South Jersey come to a (perhaps temporary) close, the dialogue has achieved very modest success, having stimulated some level of increased consciousness and action (towards the local) with the educators, administrators, and many other professionals and local residents who participated in the community forum, “Re-connecting our lives to the land.” A certain sense of hopefulness for continued (small) change in consciousness and action comes out of the spread of energy and ideas (about attentiveness to the land) that was observed from the time of my original interview series to the time of the January 8 community forum. Clearly the dialogue has spread beyond the realm of my initial ripples, and the newly introduced idea of holistic agri-*culture* does seem to be awakening some small level of ‘civic’ sensitivity.

Of course, for the sake of pragmatism it is crucial to understand *how* this is happening. Indeed, one supposition this research makes clear is that if researchers or community planners are to use a agriculture as a means of cultural transformation we must engage directly with the context-based question of how agriculture, as a framework for understanding wholeness, can inspire a particular local population. In South Jersey,

agriculture is a contested part of local landscape, local economy, and local history. Inspiring through a holistic conception of agriculture here means interacting directly with the emotions that have been attached to the local people, land, community union. Together, educators and I have found pride, optimism, nostalgia, fondness, fear, contempt, and anger all relevant to a broadened conception of agriculture in South Jersey. Together we have taken a cautious note of this wide variety of emotions, engaging with them, deconstructing them, and inspecting them in ways that have not been done before on a community level. Later, we used these dissections to inform our decisions regarding strategies for transformation. Agriculture thus provided us with a concrete location for emotions, a structure for holistic thinking and critical analysis, and a project base from which to derive inspiration.

Through this dialogic research process local residents and educators in Burlington County have also identified key area resources for the continued spread of this agriculturally-based community dialogue. They have done so not only by brainstorming and naming already existing organizations in the local area, but by coming together on the day of the community forum to discover what seems to “work” in terms of manners and methods of local communication. Indeed, the January 8 community forum revealed that Burlington County does seem to have the necessary educational resources that can help to broaden the human terrain across which we find a ‘learning culture,’ rooted in holistic attentiveness to agriculture. Particularly, the local community college, Burlington County College, played a large role as a provider of goods, services, and facilities as well as intellectual capital. This seems important not only for logistical reasons but also for what it means for county culture or ethos. By participating in the forum in this central way, Burlington County College has identified itself as a leading institution that is promoting local cultural transformation. Through the forum event, the college offered its name to this ‘new’ idea of wholeness and re-connecting to the land while remaining critical and reflexive about the institution’s own current understandings of local people, land, and community. In retaining this reflexivity, the college has helped to find a ‘critical mass’ of people and goods from various ‘sides’ of the local area, and has helped to witness a (small yet noted) increase in the county’s communal capacity to appreciate the wholeness of agriculture, land and place.

Of course, while the January 8 forum offers a good model for “wholeness” in community dialogue, the event, as well as the series of interviews and focus groups that led up to it, cannot claim to have included *everything* in its holistic vision of agriculture. The interviews, focus groups, and the forum itself were simply an example, a trial, and hopefully the start of a process. We must continue to search for ways to go further, include more, become more ‘whole’ in dialogic interactions. We must continue to be reflexive about our dialogic efforts. Specifically, have expressed in other chapters how I consider dialogue, in its ‘deep’ sense, to be inherently related to theories of ‘care’ and to a recognizable relationality of the human condition. Attentiveness to this relationality (people’s innate connectedness with the entire community of surrounding ‘others’) is perhaps the ultimate premise on top of which lies my insistence on wholeness and on critical, systems thinking. Through my dialogic research in South Jersey, Burlington County has made a small first step in the lengthy, dialectical process of forming a local ‘learning culture’. Educators and residents have begun to address issues of landscape, human ecology, and economy during this process. However, the integration of the complex unity of people-land-community, and particularly the integration of the land-ecology, into a new idea of life in which one’s relationality with these ‘others’ is paramount, seems more undecided. Perhaps this indicates a flaw in dialogue itself. Perhaps the dialogue I encourage in South Jersey does not go “deep” enough into the complexities of the human condition. Perhaps we have forgotten another dimension.

For one, as I look back on my analysis of the lines of questioning offered by the civic agriculture flyer I recognize that we may have overlooked the potentially significant dimension of ‘spirituality.’ I mean ‘spirituality’ here not so much in the sense of the spiritual as linked with belief in deity and religious dogma but as a general sense of ‘mysteriousness’ or ‘numinousness,’ which many humans have experienced as an essential part of life. I wonder whether I have failed to encourage a spiritual handling of the call for attentiveness to people, land, and community in South Jersey. My intent that transformation of ethos in South Jersey include a newfound ascendancy of relationality is a certainly a desire that goes beyond the bearing of rational intellectual thought, beliefs, feelings, and emotions to tug at our very epistemological and ontological roots. The classic philosophical, religious, or spiritual

questioning regarding human nature and the nature of reality would seem most important here. I see that these lines of questioning could have been used more palpably in dialogue.

Furthermore, in looking back at the roots of my dialogue in the civic agriculture flyer, I see the potential that paying attention to spiritual questions would allow for a greater inclusion of the land-ecology within a perceived realm of instinctive care. I say this because, on a fundamental level, both spiritual and ecological matters are matters of understanding the ways of creation and the position of humans in this greater configuration (Kinsley 1995). Indeed, I find that I can re-read my very ecologically-rooted civic agriculture questions as spiritual questions because they have to do with people understanding and becoming concerned with humanity's inherent unity with the land. Along these lines I have decided to turn back to search the transcripts of my initial trials at dialogue for signs of hidden "spiritual" commentary.

I do this, of course, with pragmatism in mind and with a keen eye on what agriculture has to offer. As an entryway, I consider how farmer and author Wendell Berry writes about the pragmatism that agriculture brings to notions of 'spirituality' or 'religion'. Berry presents the attentiveness to land that is involved with small-scale farming as an activity that can bring people closer to understanding the numinousness, the mysteriousness, of life within the greater natural world. Berry writes,

"farming is . . . a practical religion, a practice of religion, a rite. By farming we enact our fundamental connection with energy and matter, light and darkness. In the cycles of farming, which carry the elemental energy again and again through the seasons and the bodies of living things, we recognize the only infinitude within reach of the imagination. How long this cycling of energy will continue we do not know . . . but by aligning ourselves with it here, in our little time within the unimaginable time of the sun's burning, we touch infinity; we align ourselves with the universal law that brought the cycles into being and that will survive them." (Berry 1977, 87).

Wendell Berry's poignant words demonstrate the fullness that agriculture can bring to one's spiritual experience of life on earth. The act of tilling the soil, the cultivation of crops, the preparation of food, and the sharing of meals all are shown as acts of both practical and spiritual importance. Agriculture as a way to comprehend humanity's union with the rest of creation indeed seems valuable to the idea of inspiring an increased posture of 'care' towards the land-ecology (as well as the whole of people-land-community). The final chapter looks

into ways South Jersey can address linkages of spirituality, land, and agriculture that may have practical importance for inspiring further transformation of ethos and an improved attentiveness to the people-land-community union.

CHAPTER FIVE: Becoming the Land Walking

“Nature always wears the colors of the spirit.”
(from *Nature*, Ralph Waldo Emerson, 7)

Introduction

In the previous chapters I have characterized Burlington County as a region that has endured rapid suburban development of farmland and open space in recent decades. Indeed, Burlington County, more than other counties in New Jersey, has experienced an accelerating increase in strip mall development and sprawling suburban housing since the end of World War II, with the advent of mass-produced Levittown-type construction. For some time now, the realities of environmental and landscape degradation in the county have been well documented. Today the ecological fragility of the land is clear as habitat destruction, non-point source pollution, and stormwater runoff continue to create problems for local residents and wildlife alike. In earlier parts of the Twentieth Century, Burlington County was much less developed, maintaining a quite bucolic character as an area of widespread family farms and nucleated, walkable small towns and villages. While this relatively recent past cannot claim to have been ‘environmentally’ perfect, it was, at least on the level of physical design, more in tune with the ecological integrity of the land^a.

Herein lies a complex dilemma into which I have tried to insert some clarity. To many of those who are concerned with the trends of landscape change in Burlington County, both old-timers and newcomers alike, the past represents a time in which local residents were more connected to the land and to each other. People suppose that in the ‘olden days’ of endless orchards and small downtowns, regional sense of place and stewardship was high. Whether or not this is true, as residents begin to critique the modern way of life – its fast-pace, its heavy reliance on automobiles, its consumerism and materialism, and its rapid depletion of natural resources – they discover a sense of longing for what they perceive to have been better, more ecologically and socially conscious times. As a result, we note that nostalgia runs deep in much of the commentary on ‘place’ and ‘civic agriculture’ that I have received from respondents in the Burlington County area. This nostalgia is crucial and will be brought further into this analysis. However, taking note of nostalgia does not mean that any call to action found in the cultural reflection of this research will urge for a ‘return’ to a

utopian, rural way of life. We have seen through the civic agriculture dialogue that cultural analysis can make exploratory use of emotions like nostalgia to bring out their practical application as sources of motivation and inspiration for social change. We have also seen that while drawing on these emotions in analysis can help to inspire stewardship, this kind of analysis alone may not go far enough to encourage a full appreciation of the unity of people-land-community.

So, while I recognize that many cultural texts from Burlington County which refer directly to life *within* the area will have undertones of nostalgia, I do not want to focus on this in this final chapter. Instead here I look past emotionality in the written and spoken word to something *beyond or beneath*, something that has in fact been suppressed. I do not want to insist that this “beyond” somehow surpasses – i.e. is better, greater, or more pressing than – the emotional realm. I only contend my search implies asking harder questions, probing beneath the surface. I have implied in the last chapter that the ‘beyond’ I look to might be explained by the realm of ‘spirituality’ yet I will try to show that it is really a domain much broader than that which is typically denoted by this word. I attempt to penetrate into the depths of culture, using ontological and epistemological questioning to uncover new ways of encouraging sense of place and stewardship.

In doing so, I draw upon new academic insights. Currently, there exists a growing field of academic inquiry that might best be termed ‘Spiritual Ecology.’ This growing field examines the interface between ecological thought and ‘spirituality’ (or ‘religion’ in the broadest sense of the term). The growth of the field is premised on the notion that to-date a variety of secular attempts to address the world ‘environmental crisis,’ as an eco-social crisis, have not been sufficient and that the realm of the spiritual (or religious) provides an untapped source from which to draw necessary new perspective and inspiration. In Spiritual Ecology, then, spirituality is seen as a dimension of life that may be crucial for future ecological integrity and ‘sustainability.’

^a To reiterate an earlier point, I use the term ‘land’ to refer not only to the earth or soil but to the total ecology of a place, including all that lives and is build on the land.

In this chapter I take the basic premise of Spiritual Ecology as a springboard from which to attempt to create a new way of analyzing culture – indeed, a new way of reflecting upon culture – that advances ‘spirituality’s’ potential to inspire ecological attentiveness. By doing this I provide another possible means of enhanced social ‘resistance’ to environmental/landscape degradation, based on an alternative way of thinking and feeling about one’s surroundings. If attempted on a community level, what I am about to describe could also have the capacity to enhance civic cohesiveness. I then test out this new epistemology of resistance using cultural ‘texts’ – discourses, prose, and poetry – from the Burlington County area in order to demonstrate how stimulus for ‘spirit’ based ecological attentiveness can be found beneath the surface of contemporary ways of life. Because I am specifically concerned with charting the growth of ecological attentiveness on a small, ‘human’ scale, I rely upon only those cultural texts which refer directly to life *within* this one given local context.

Along these lines, in the coming pages I elaborate a method of evaluating cultural expressions of ‘place’ by means of an analytic I call “intimate knowing.” I begin by developing the frameworks of this analytic, drawing on a variety of texts from psychology, religion, literature, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. The analytic of intimate knowing helps me to reveal an alternative ontological positioning that draws humankind closer to the land-ecology. This new positioning strives for a certain neutrality and innocence in regard to the supposed contrast between, on the one hand, ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ beliefs and, on the other, ‘secular’ worldviews, by suggesting that a general commonality exists in human community’s inherent connectedness with the land (and each other).

When I then use the analytic of intimate knowing to probe cultural texts I find ways of speaking to the human-land relationship that make room for multiple varieties of new inspiration. Accordingly, the analytic allows me to consider the idea of “spirit-in-nature” in a new way – a *practical* way. That is, I find that an argument for the existence of ‘spirit’ in land, landscape, or ecology does not have to rely upon proving the existence of some supernatural entity hidden in nature. On the contrary, if we were to insist on this, it may reinforce a

dichotomy between the natural and 'supernatural' (or the material world and some mystical realm), contradicting a more basic and earthly notion of spiritual connectedness with nature. Instead I make an argument, at once spiritually and materially rooted, that when people have experienced an underlying 'spirit' in nature what they have found is a basic ontological/epistemological grounding for caring for the land. In terms of promoting land stewardship and civic awareness, my search is thus a purposeful one: by exploring cultural expressions, I want to show how the process of evaluating and questioning humanity's link with the natural world can help us to locate motivational energy for stewardship. In a sense, then, this final chapter opens up the potential for an alternate, concurrent, or smaller, internal dialogue to be had within or alongside the 'civic agriculture' dialogue presented in Chapter Four. In the coming pages I develop the premise of another community dialogue that is just emerging – one that we might call the 'intimate knowing' dialogue.

Along these lines, before examining the theoretical basis for this new dialogue, I want to clarify the 'methodology' of this final chapter, and how it relates with my other dialogic research. The cultural 'texts' that I examine in regard to 'intimate knowing' come from both 'dialogic' and 'non-dialogic' sources; I draw on printed prose and poetry that has been written for or about regional South Jersey (since the early 1990s), and I also re-examine the transcripts from the interview stage of my 2004 research in Burlington County. Although I began to develop the concept of 'intimate knowing' during this interview stage, unlike my treatment of the 'civic agriculture' dialogue, I did not discuss the themes and theories of 'intimate knowing' with my interview respondents. However, I do have reason to label 'intimate knowing' as an "emergent dialogue" and not just a model or scheme yet to be tried. After the interview portion of my research was complete, I was able to pass on the idea in written (essay) form to almost half of the educators with whom I spoke. I received feedback from a handful of these educators via e-mail. Later, at the January 8 community forum, the 'intimate knowing' essay was again passed on, this time as one of a few free publications on the forum literature table. Here again I have received informal feedback from a handful of forum participants. This preliminary feedback suggests that, along with the 'civic

agriculture' dialogue others are interested in exploring the 'intimate knowing' lines of questioning in further group discussions.

Intimate Knowing

As we will come to see shortly, there could be numerous ways of explaining what I mean by intimate knowing. None, I feel, can describe it quite right. Intimate knowing is, perhaps, beyond words. However, in trying to develop a framework for analysis based on intimate knowing, we must begin with intimations, allusions, and narratives, and negotiate from there.

Gnosis

I want to make use of the Greek word 'gnosis' as a starting point for describing the analytic of intimate knowing. Probably the most familiar use of 'gnosis' today comes in discussion of the 'gnostic gospels,' which were once considered parts of an esoteric tradition that was conveyed only to those who were "spiritually mature."^b This association with a certain sense of spiritual development is helpful, yet historically 'gnosis' had more inclusive connotations calling to mind ideas of closeness, understanding, even friendship. To know something in the sense of 'gnosis' is to know it as though it were your friend or sister. The meaning is parallel to that of the Spanish verb *conocer*^c. In Spanish, if a person knows a fact or method, she uses *saber*, but if she has met an individual before and thus has a relationship with that person she uses *conocer*. A person might know – *sabe* – a place, but if she knows – *conoce* – that place, she knows it in a relational sense with keen familiarity and a depth that penetrates her character.

Thus, 'gnosis' is a relational way of knowing. It is this relationality that is so important to the analytic of "intimate knowing" and to how it intermingles with the question of socio-ecological wellbeing. If I were to say that humans need to *love* the land or need to

^b This summation of the meaning of 'gnostic' gospels comes from the introduction to the Gospel of Philip.

feel the pain of the land, some would dismiss my suggestions as merely “new age” eccentricisms, perhaps amusing but hopelessly idealistic. But this is not my argument. My point is not normative, but ontological. I offer a “who are we?” rather than a “should we?” In trying to develop the analytic, I am saying that if we were to reach an “intimate knowledge” of the land, we would be connecting with an awareness that allows a person to be with the earth (the physical world) in its pain and harmony. In this way, the analytic is not arguing that we *ought* to care or we *ought* to love, it is rather offering a new framework for recognizing who we are as humans.

Of course, there is much difficulty in trying to explain the inter-workings of a certain “intimate” human connection with the greater natural (physical) world. We might try to describe such a connection as “deep” or “mystical,” but if we do we must take care to pay heed to the variety of ideological assertions that have been culturally associated with these words. Though difficult, trying to explain this connection helps us to identify what “intimacy” with the physical world *could* mean and negotiate its significance for our context. Already many religions have attempted to describe human ways of knowing the universe integrally or intimately. In fact there is a growing body of literature from Spiritual Ecology now suggesting that if we are to analyze the ontological positions of texts coming from a variety of dissimilar religions, spiritualities, and worldviews, there are variations of one emerging holistic meaning behind all of them^d. Indeed, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim and other leaders in the field seem to suggest, that beyond all of the ‘partial’ kinds of religion (and secular life), there is a convergence point that makes us whole. That point of convergence is the ecological-ontological point that I try to make with my descriptions of intimate knowing: the point that to know intimately, or to develop an awareness of one’s connectedness with the rest of the world, is perhaps the ‘ultimate truth’ of existence.

^c Similar verb designations of different types of knowing can be found in French and Portuguese.

^d For an introduction to these varied spiritual-ecological texts try Taylor, Bron. 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*. Continuum Press. or the academic journal *worldviews: Environment, Culture, and Religion*. Foltz (2003), Gottlieb (2004), and Kinsley (1995) are also helpful.

Spirit

I will come back to the implications of religion for the analytic of intimate knowing momentarily. However, I want to mention another group of thinkers that may be helpful to this examination. This group I call the “ecopsychologists,” taking the word from a 1995 book entitled *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. Ecopsychology, as all psychology, deals with examining the borders of the soul. Ecopsychologists see the soul as connected to the physical world, and they argue that we can no longer bypass this connection in our living and teaching. Many argue that the “cut between the self and the natural world is arbitrary” – culturally produced – and urge us to reconsider the way we think about and relate to the world in order to heal self, community, and earth (Roszak et al 1995, xix).

Of course, ecopsychologists are not the only thinkers in the academic and professional worlds who have questioned the nature and boundaries of the self. Others have been developing this ontological point for centuries. An example is the concept of the “continuity of being” in ancient Chinese philosophical texts that has been developed by professor Tu Weiming in his article “The Continuity of Being: Chinese visions of nature.” The concept starts with a basic recognition of *ch’i*, translated as “matter-energy,” “material force,” “vital power,” or sometimes “breath.” *Ch’i* is the link between matter and consciousness -- the “psycho-physiological stuff” that is everywhere (Tu 2003, 210-211). *Ch’i* is the essential substance that we all share – from humans to trees to rocks. The way that this idea connects with gnosis, or intimate knowing, is that we can train ourselves to look to our inner worlds and find that which is in rocks, plants, and animals, as well as that which “was in the beginning” (a phrase common in Zen). *Ch’i* involves a certain awareness of *being within the world*.

While the specific language of *ch’i* may be unique to the Chinese culture, the basic ideas of the continuity of being and the sharing of some life-force with the rest of the natural world can be found in numerous other cultures across the globe. Indigenous ontologies provide the easiest parallels, but there are many examples from which to choose. Of course,

one of the best places to look is religion, because religion deals most directly with metaphysical and ontological questions. Religion – "re-ligare," that which ties us together – offers us ways of understanding our place in the world, our connectedness with others, and the mysteries and glories of existence (Webster 1951, 1228). However, as many have noted (Lynne White, Wendell Berry, and Yi-Fu Tuan to name a few), the relationship between religion and ecology is problematical. Furthermore, religion, in the modern day, has become something that tears cultures/peoples apart more than something that binds. On the other hand, the work of the Forum on Religion and Ecology proves there is great hope for religious dialogue on "environmental" issues. However, in trying to avoid "religious" language that may be exclusionary or objectionable to some, I would like to suggest an alternative terminology for discussing the analytic of intimate knowing.

The word "spiritual" may seem like an obvious substitute because it hints at ideas of an "ultimate reality" without pointing at a specific religious tradition. However, I find that the word has already been loaded with 'religious,' 'divine,' or 'heavenly' connotations that make it hard for some to abide. In the existing language culture of South Jersey today, as elsewhere, the word 'spirituality' is imbued with an ethereal overtone. This overtone has been maintained by the dichotomy between that which is 'divine' or 'spiritual' and that which is 'earthly' or 'natural' in dualistic cultures. Yet, it is precisely this kind of dichotomous thinking that the analytic of intimate knowing looks to overcome. Along these lines, the root word of spiritual – spirit – is a less contested term that has an appealing etymology. Spirit (much like *ch'i*) originally meant "breath" and has been conceived as a connecting word between consciousness and matter. As a central term it helps us to overcome the Cartesian dichotomy of mind-body and binds nature and 'spirituality.' We can use 'spirit' in the same way the Chinese use *ch'i* to ask, can ethereal spirituality and the earth be met in the idea that there is a common spirit (breath, life-force) in humans, animals, plants, waters, and soils? Furthermore, can this happen in a way that renews people, land, and community? It seems that in asking this, we must recognize that when nature and religion are split, we end up with

all kinds of insensitivities, which are unhelpful in terms of caring for the oneness of people-land-community. We might also consider, as ecological writer Charlene Spretnak does, that more accurate than labeling 'spiritual' experiences as ethereal and "supernatural" may be to refer to them as "ultra-natural" (Spretnak in Jensen 1995, 44).

Depth

I have consistently used the words 'deep' and 'depth' to describe intimate knowing, but I have not stopped to reflect on what deepness really implies in these descriptions. To portray a concept like intimate knowing as "deep" seems essential because I would not want it to be considered the opposite – shallow or superficial. Depth also seems necessary because it suggests mysteriousness, richness, and profundity – all connotations I encourage. Yet, paradoxically, what I really mean by "depth" can be found in "simplicity" – that is, the deepness that comes with one's reflection on the simple awareness of existence *within* the world. Psychology professor Laura Sewall describes this kind of simple-depth effectively in her essay, "The Skill of Ecological Perception." Sewall discusses a certain depth coming from "a recognition of being within, held by, and always touched by Earth and air." (Sewall in Roszak 1995, 212) She agrees with eco-philosopher and essayist David Abram's suggestion that "depth is the primordial dimension because we are entirely *in* depth." So depth perception becomes not one's ability to discern visual distances but rather to sense the reality of one's existence as entirely internal to the greater ecological world.

If we consider depth in this way, then we also have to recognize what it is that we may be contrasting depth with on certain analytical levels. It is interesting that often to the "eco-minded" sub-set of the population depth is synonymous with ecology/goodness/truth and shallowness often implies money/depravity/corruption of truth. Ecologically oriented critics of current mainstream culture often single out the market economy, materialistic values, and corporate consumerism as corrosive to the unity of people-land-community. We see this especially in essays on industrial agriculture and the overhaul of traditions of land

stewardship by big agri-business. These associations are useful in trying to get at some of the nuances of intimate knowing, not because they are to be taken as ‘correct’ without critical reflection, but because they represent valid appreciations of the complex and tenuous terrain between ecological harmony and the human condition. They can help us to work out why it is that modern society seems so unattached and inattentive to the lands – the places – we call home.

So, let us reflect on degrees of depth. Why, in the minds of many environmental thinkers, does there seem to be a depth in trees, birds, mountains, and streams that is lacking in toys, cars, computer screens, and perfume? We might choose to describe depth using the idea of spirit (or *ch'i*). In the entire material world – in everything from trees to cars – there is never an absence of spirit. However, in ‘gross matter’ (a Buddhist term) the spirit is muted as a result of the industrial recontrivance of the matter in a way that is out of touch with spirit (the Chinese might say, out of touch with *li*, the inner principle of, say, patterns in wood). In other words, objects or materials lose depth when matter is rearranged without consciousness or consideration for the object as spirit. Hence, for example, it is hard to see cars as part of that greater ecological world of which we are a part. The gross material world is “gross” due to its being contrived in such a way. If we begin to focus only on the material world that has been dulled by a lack of consciousness of spirit, then we begin to live more and more non-deep, “exoteric” lives. We miss the depth, the esoteric wisdom that comes with gnosis, intimate knowing.

It is important to note that recognizing depth through the analytic of intimate knowing is not a question of pro-matter or anti-matter, but, as we see above, a question of *which* matter. The development of an ontology of connectedness insists that we consider the material world as central to the so-called “depth” of life or human existence. Yet, we may find that the expression of such matter-relevant depth is difficult precisely because there is an anti-matter discourse that runs through many Western religions, separating 'spiritual depth'

from the physical world. Indeed, the most common means to express a sense of (spiritual) inspiration from nature may be by relating experiences of nature to certain well-known discourses in which depth as a spiritual term is clearly distinguished from matter. Of course, in these cases the term 'spirit' itself is also mis-used; that is, it is not used in the holistic, pre-dualistic sense of the word that I try for with the faculty of intimate knowing.

As a result of this confusion surrounding spiritual depth and the material world, I want to propose a distinguishing technology for speaking of 'spirit.' In trying to move beyond the dualism of spirit and matter, philosopher Ashok Gangadean describes a ground of our beings at which we are part of a *one* that represents the interconnectedness of all. We return to this ground or grounded state in the meditative traditions of the world, and hints of it can be found in all of our cultures, ethics, and literatures. Gangadean explains this ground as integral space, a space in which non-dualistic thinking occurs. In writing and speaking, Gangadean uses the double bracket to refer to concepts that he wishes to charge with this holistic, integral, non-dualistic sense (Gangadean 1993). From this point forth I will use [[spirit]] to refer to a sense of the term that fuses spiritual depth with matter.

I have said that this kind of conception of [[spirit]] and spiritual depth is difficult, yet it is not untried in the Western world. Even non-religious thinkers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the young Marx would all be familiar with what I am getting at with [[spirit]]. The work of each of these philosophers points to some kind of theory of existence that is not anti-matter, but that, like the theory of *ch'i*, combines body, earth, and spirit in reaching towards 'deeper' dimensions of life. Likewise, my conception of [[spirit]] tries to revisit a holistic and pre-dualistic philosophy of existence and creates no dividing line between materialists and idealists. Of course, many of the writers and speakers whom I quote in this paper do not adhere to this holistic way of thinking. They often allude to spirit or spiritual depth in a single-bracketed, dualistic sense. Their contact with 'nature' and/or the greater physical world is often informed by pre-existing ontological positionings that uphold the matter-spirit

dichotomy. Their words often allude to this dichotomy. Thus, as I examine cultural 'texts,' my analysis becomes a project to show how it is possible to free such words from the various ideological discourses in which they operate. I do this in an attempt to get back to the ground of human experience, our pre-conscious background connection, our ontological underpinnings.

The Ultra-Natural in Cultural Texts

Although to an untrained eye this kind of lived focus on [[spirit]] may seem absent from contemporary culture, under the surface it is possible find examples of [[spirit]]-thinking in cultural 'texts' from numerous local settings^e. Yet, before I apply the analytic of intimate knowing to the texts of Burlington County, I think it would be helpful to get a feel for the kind of expressive evidence that provided the impetus to search for ideas of [[spirit]] in South Jersey. This mid-section of the paper offers a brief collection of quotations and looks at how they fit into the analytic of intimate knowing. All of the quotations are taken from figures well known within environmental circles, and thus all may have a certain bias. Yet I will not attempt critical analysis of these quotations or the social spaces from which they are spoken. The point of this mid-section is not to examine why it is that these figures have been able to find inspiration in nature. The point here is simply to appreciate the diversity of ways writers have converged on the same basic idea.

The notion of oneness with "nature," or rather, with the entire physical world is central to the analytic of intimate knowing. Intimate knowing points to the universal mystery, the meaning or groundedness of life. It presses people to ask, are our beings continuous with the rest of creation? Of course, using the analytic does not entail that we answer this question as such, but that we embrace the mystery, and discover in nature, land,

^e By 'text' I mean not only written texts but also events and daily practices that can be 'read' in terms of their cultural implications.

or whole environment a central basis for inspiration. The expression of such an outlook has taken many forms in ecological writing. Many writers have explored the idea that the body's senses can help us to reap knowledge from the land -- specifically knowledge of 'universal truths.' For example, nature writer Ralph Waldo Emerson communicates this in his early work:

In the woods . . . I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God. (Emerson from "Nature," *Selected Prose and Poetry*, 6)

Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life . . . (Emerson from "Nature," *Selected Prose and Poetry*, 16)

And finally, in a striking passage written September 8 1833,

There is a correspondence between the human soul and everything that exists in the world . . . Instead of studying things without principles of them, all may be penetrated unto within him . . . The purpose of life seems to be to acquaint man with himself . . . to live to the real future by living to the real present. (Emerson, from *Journals*, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, 468)

In this last quotation, Emerson reveals an integration of the entire environment, including the built or human-made environment, into the ecological whole in which he finds [[spirit]]. We can read into his commentary the idea that 'meaning' in life is connected to one's ability to comprehend connectedness -- man's ability to acquaint himself "with himself." This includes recognizing man-made things as part of ecology and striving to live up to this insight.

Through his passages, Emerson finds motivation for stewardship, not in longing for the past but in the thought of being "true" to the connectedness he has come to feel. Other ecological thinkers and writers have expressed a similar care for the land that has come out of their discovery of a sense of connectedness to the rest of creation. Starting with Emerson,

I feel the centipede in me, -- cayman, carp, eagle, and fox. I am moved by strange sympathies." (Emerson from "Journals," *Selected Prose and Poetry*, 466)

Then moving to others:

Everything is integral and interacts with everything else. This means that nothing is itself without everything else. There is a commonality, an integrity, an intimacy of the universe with itself. (cultural historian Thomas Berry in Jensen 1995, 43)

The essence of wilderness practice is to be wilderness. The very idea that wilderness exists as something separate lets us know how much we have disowned our internal as well as our external wilderness (naturalist Steven Harper, Roszak 1995, 183)

'Nature . . . has neither core nor skin: she's both at once outside and in.' (Poet and ecological writer Betty Roszak quoting Goethe – Roszak 1995, 300).

The soil, the water, the air and all other life-forms contributed parts to our flesh. We are our land. (Indigenous scholar Jeannette Armstrong, Armstrong in Jensen 1995, 323).

We are place. (Dave Forman, co-founder of Earth First! in Jensen 1995, 5)

The idea that we are place, that people and land is really one in the same, is a striking suggestion. Of course, it assigns great value to 'nature' as we think of it today, and specifically to ecological integrity and sustainability. However, it also deems human life as something of great consequence. If people and land are integrally connected, then land is not whole without the human species, including all of the modifications that we bring to our habitats. Earth wants and needs people for its oneness. Thus, 'society' would seem to have reason to want to recognize this oneness and to try to contribute to a certain synchronization or balance in our connected existence with the earth.

Still, many make the criticism that current social trends do the opposite; these trends move further and further from recognizing the innate connectedness of people and land. For example, social theorist and feminist scholar Susan Griffin counsels that,

The part of the mind that is dark to us in this culture, that is sleeping in us, that we name 'unconscious' is the knowledge that we are inseparable from all other beings in the universe (Griffin in Jensen 2000, 317).

Yet, using the faculty of intimate knowing as a criterion, it is possible to select out many an individual who not only has become aware of the possibility of [[spirit]] in the land, but also has come to realize that the potential to find [[spirit]] in all matter may be essential for the future health of the world. The analytic of intimate knowing helps us find the degree to which people are sensing an internal connectedness with the environment and how they choose to explain it. In doing so, the analytic helps to bring to the surface a dialogue or framework of connectedness that can motivate care for the whole of people, land, and

community in a local area. I turn now to apply the analytic to the ‘cultural texts’ of Burlington County.

Burlington County

The writers and thinkers whom I have quoted above all have one important commonality. Not only have they all frequently mused about their connectedness with the world of nature but also most of them have been in frequent contact with other authors, activists, or academics with whom to exchange ideas. This is certainly not the usual case of the general public in Burlington County, Southern New Jersey nor even of the county’s leading educators, administrators, and officials – those individuals who might be considered the top decision-makers in terms of culture and environment in the region. For this reason, it proves difficult to find the same kind of evidence of people drawing on a sense of “continuity of being” between themselves and the land. In Burlington County I have searched for signs -- I have looked for articulations of “oneness” with the land or intimate knowing. Yet, most of the cultural evidence points elsewhere, perhaps because the idea of “oneness” cannot be read in the landscape. As one New Jersey biologist satirically reveals, the “prime habitat” for viewing the human species in the state is now the car-dependent regional shopping mall (Burger 2000). The design of regional malls, strip malls, office parks, and parking lots does not speak to an understanding of connectedness.

Yet, this is not the whole story. As noted above, Burlington County has a history in agriculture, and although many family farms have been bulldozed for the development of suburban housing, this landscape change has not decreased some residents’ affection for the ideals of land-connection represented in the image of small-scale agriculture. Indeed, I find that as a result of this long tradition in agriculture, farming often provides ready symbolism with which to express an internal connectedness with highly localized ecological seasonality and earthly rhythms. It is not uncommon here for an individual to make some effort to tie her

life cycles and rounds with agricultural cycles and rounds. Regular events in which this happens include seasonal or harvest festivals and local weekend farmers' markets, which are imbued with nostalgia for earlier days of a 'simpler' romanticized rural existence. What does this say about 'gnosis' of place?

In order to try to answer this question, I begin by examining what agriculture has to offer in terms of ontological and epistemological reflection. Academically, not much has been written on the idea that agriculture, at least in theory, can provide logic for an ontology of connectedness. Farmer Trauger Groh, an author of the prognostic books *Farms of Tomorrow* and *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited*, comments that although much has been written on the benefits of (small-scale, non-industrial) farming, when we discuss the future of agriculture, "rarely do we have in mind the great contribution that living on farms and working in nature gives to our inner soul development" (Groh 2000, 3). Groh's vision for farming is not about the re-creation of some rural society, but about creating new relationships between citizens and farmland in which people are not missing the basic social experience of human-to-human and human-to-non-human interconnectedness that comes from cultivating the earth in non-industrial, non-abstract, ways.

Along these lines we can begin to understand the longing some South Jersey natives express for an alternate time in which it was easier to grasp the [[spirit]] in nature that nature writers and activists have expressed. The suggestion from Trauger Groh's book that there are "profound lessons" to be learned from attentiveness to farms in particular and land in general is not absent in the cultural milieu of South Jersey. As Groh explains, some people have begun to sense a need for re-establishing the relationship of the human species "to the basic sources of our livelihood" (Groh 2000, 31). Thus, although there exists no perfect model of agriculture, past or present, that would seem unequivocally acceptable, to farmers and non-farmers alike, agriculture offers an obvious means to re-connect life to the land.

Accordingly, paying particular attention to agriculture and to the use of seasonal metaphors, I analyze the written and spoken word in Burlington County along the lines of the

analytic of intimate knowing. In doing this I also attempt to engage critically with the analytic itself, searching for the biases, the authority, and the politics behind its found speakers. I sift through cultural texts in this way not only to make the simple case that some people are in fact sensing a connection with nature, but also to show how learning to think along these lines can offer others a way of understanding humanity's connectedness to the land, while at the same time retaining reflexivity. This way of thinking 'resists' the message of disconnection to place and ecology offered by the current landscape. The 'resistance' comes in the discovery of an ontological/epistemological standpoint that changes perspectives and is inspirational.

Written word

I start by analyzing cultural texts in written form. In analyzing literature, I begin with the suggestion by ecocritic and author Scott Russell Sanders that "a deep awareness of nature" has essentially been eliminated from mainstream fiction (Sanders 1996, 192). If one were to assess Saunder's conviction *in place* – that is, to look at the collection of fiction that has been written in, for, or about South Jersey – one would find the claim quite accurate. Not much in "South Jersey" mainstream fiction is suggestive of an awareness of land. For instance, Rick Moody's recent novel *Garden State* has very little to do with the garden as farm/land/ecology (Moody 1992). In other works, the 'garden' of the Garden State may be more visible, but not much more valuable to character development. The collection of short stories by Robert Bateman entitled '*Over the Garden State*' and *Other Stories* uses farm and rural settings as backdrops, but humans in these stories are still largely disconnected from the land. Even in the story "Cedar Run," in which Bateman draws out the idea that the farm and family tradition in farming is more important than money, there is no evidence that the characters derive their identity from a sense of union with land-ecology (Bateman 2000).

Of course, the fact that "Cedar Run" fails to offer any hints at an ontology of connectedness to be found in farm life may be because the depiction of agriculture it offers is a more realistic representation of the farming industry. Truly, most farms in Burlington County cannot claim (nor do they try to claim) to operate along the lines of the visionary

models of farming offered by farmers like Trauger Groh and well known farmer-novelist-poet Wendell Berry. Many Burlington County farmers would probably agree that the realities of the farming business, particularly the economic realities, make it difficult to locate, let alone to live true to, an ontology of connectedness in their work. In addition, the use of pesticides and fertilizers, although leveling off, is still very much an integral and compulsory part of the functioning of the farm and the production of profitable produce yields. Just like the automobile-filled landscape then, these 'necessary' impacts make it more difficult to read an ontology of connectedness into this line of work. Still, of course, it may be there; farm work need not be perfectly 'ecological' for such an ontology to be discovered. However, in applying the 'intimate knowing' analytic one should be aware of the need of farmers to make a living -- which presses them to make sure they protect their crop yields in *any* way they can, and which will take first priority over "living true" to an ontology of connectedness.

In terms of this dynamic between farming as an occupation and farming as an (often romanticized) way of life, it is worth mentioning the work of South Jersey-born Kathleen DeMarco, a member of the prominent DeMarco cranberry growing family. Her novel *Cranberry Queen* comes closer to the idea of union with one's surroundings in advancing a theme of self-healing through the cultural and aesthetic aspects of the Pinelands cranberry harvest. On the other hand, the novel still depicts the bog landscape within the framework of the nature-society dualism that is so common to modern ways of thought. At times, the reader wonders whether the novel's characters have the depth to think about the natural world in other than prescribed ways. Of course, the fact that DeMarco reveals the cranberry landscape as a place to 'lose oneself' suggests that the author may indeed sense a certain unity with her childhood homeplace. This is intriguing given her adulthood choice to move to Manhattan. As a film producer and writer, DeMarco does not live with the more problematic daily realities of farming, and perhaps for this reason is *more* able to locate a motivational

force in the ideal of ecological connectedness that she reads into farm life. I address this question of romanticized visions of agriculture and unity with place more fully in a moment.

Such unity with place as we find in DeMarco's *Cranberry Queen* comes even more readily in the unusual writings of Harry Monesson, a berry grower and a life-long resident of the Jersey Pine Barrens. The Pines have been described as a place in which true 'natives' ("Pineys") have a keen internal awareness of both local geography and ecology. One only has to look as far as novelist John McPhee's *The Pine Barrens* to understand the intensity with which some natives feel connected to the place in its ecological-socio-cultural whole. More than other area municipalities, Pinelands townships may really be understood as 'habitats' in the fullest ecological sense. To add to this, the Pines have been described as a place of much mystery, a place where the natural and 'supernatural' meet. All of this human ecology and mystery comes out quite clearly in Monesson's work as he expresses a complex relationship to place and demonstrates an 'insider,' if not intimate, knowledge of the land.

Furthermore, Monesson's recent novel *Boggenskroggin* (2000), though decidedly whimsical, works openly against the trend to "spoil" nature with today's material/consumer culture. The message is clear: people in the Pines care more about the land and place than city- metropolitan folk realize. The land is part of who they are and a source of creativity and inspiration. There is something magical and penetrating in Monesson's descriptions of nature – particularly in the way he animates the creatures of the Pines who ask the "city-folk" not to destroy their habitat. In *Boggenskroggin*, Johnny Bogfeller sings from his Cranberry House:

Into the bogs and pines they come to get away from it,
to break and turn nature into a city-minded fit.
They seek with murderous sprays a wilderness healthier,
that's why there ain't no Brinelands Merquiterers in Philerdelphier...

and he continues later:

Never was there such a fearsome feller,
Dapper dressed in green and yellor.
His watch in drowned land sugar sands,
Treefrog shouts, "DON'T SPOIL ME BRINELANDS!"

Monesson demonstrates with this and other works an attempt at playful, eclectic expression of the absurdity of cultural disconnection from the land^f. First, Monesson's characters are ambiguous creatures; the reader is not sure if they are human, animal, or otherwise. Thus, we might say that Monesson's style is not personification per se, but rather a vague dissolution of the boundaries between humans and the rest of the natural world. In this way his novels could be seen as a critique on the dualism of nature and humanity. Secondly, Monesson makes clear that the rationality of the urban-suburban dweller and the Pinelands native are different. The environment of the Pines affects the mind of the native in ways that become integral to his own cognitive structure. In this way, Monesson embodies a rather vivid current in the 'alternative' ethos of the Pines, that there is *something* quite special and quite mysterious located here. Implicit in this current, then, is the understanding that if there is an idea of [[spirit]] anywhere in the cultural milieu of South Jersey, it is in the Pines. We find this sentiment in the Pines perhaps because it has held on to multiple landscape-level and community-level uniquenesses of 'place.' There is a sense in the Pines that in being aware of these uniquenesses, which range from endangered native species and vernacular architectural styles to gun clubs and motorcycle groups, locals draw themselves closer to understanding the mysterious [[spirit]] of the place. Thus, in terms of locating [[spirit]] here, it seems that what matters most is not to have a life void of negative 'eco-social' impacts (things, like motorcycles, that seem to contradict knowledge of connectedness), but to remain always conscious of local uniquenesses of place.

This is not to give up on the idea of "living ecologically." True, having consciousness of the importance of place-based uniquenesses is not sufficient to claim that one has found [[spirit]] in the physical world in the way that the analytic of intimate knowing suggests. One also has to be sensitive to one's connectedness, how all of it leads back to the land. In the Pines, this is perhaps easier to see than in surrounding big cities like Philadelphia

^f Monesson's other novels include *Knibblers in the Sand*, *Sand Sharks in the Pines*, *Up a Cranberry Tree*, *The World's Biggest Tummy*, and *Berry Patch Tales*.

or New York, and as Monesson implies, problems arise in the Pines when the “insensitive” people with a “city mentality” appear on the scene. Monesson’s writings would suggest that insensitivity to connectedness is ‘outsider’ or newcomer influence, and this may be an accurate characterization. Still, we might ask, can holding onto the idea of an *isolated* Pine Barrens help to solve the loss of ecological integrity and place-attentive community that Monesson alludes to? While maintaining a degree of ‘insider’ pride, nostalgia, and sense of the numinous in the Pines might be key to Pine Barrens locals’ ‘care,’ they may also need to discover a way to present city-folk (and suburban folk) with this ‘land-based wisdom.’

The last example of written expressions I want to examine is a series of local poems. Many of the poems make use of religious vocabulary to explain experiences of land/landscape. They seem to point to something sacred, divine, or ‘spiritual’ to be found in the physical surroundings of South Jersey. While I have sought to find an explanation of [[spirit]] that does not rely on ‘spiritual’ terminology, the representation of sacred in the physical world surely adds to the complexity of the examples we have come upon. In other words, though the analytic of intimate knowing is not dependent on ideas of spirituality or religion, it might be enhanced by such themes. The following two examples of poetry come from *Word Spinners*, a yearly anthology of prose and verse presented at local literary seminars.

I begin with “The Sacred Hunt,” written by Harry Monesson (1995), the same Pinelands native and berry grower who wrote *Boggenskrogin* and a series of other locally based novels. The ontological position that Monesson advances in the poem is in line with the cosmogony that Tu Weiming describes in “The Continuity of Being.” Furthermore, the view of the human-animal relationship that Monesson develops here is at once cyclic, egalitarian, and pragmatic. “The Sacred Hunt” refers not to hunting deer, but to deer that are “hunting” cranberries to eat in a farmer’s cranberry bog. Although the deer destroy the crop, the speaker (the farmer) wishes them no harm. The farmer watches the deer, and while admitting that at other times he hunts the animal, he says, “I am honored to walk in their

circle.” Thus, not only are the deer depicted as sacred, but so too does the speaker reveal a certain sacredness in the circle of life.

Indeed, the speaker portrays his place in the physical world as though he is contingent, part of a greater whole. He describes a sense of communion with his surroundings that appreciates the need to come to grips with one’s own ontological position in the chain of life - that means, for example, accepting the ‘bunny in the jaws of a bear’ or ‘the deer in the grips of a hunter.’ The message that Monesson conveys quite strongly here is that humans can offer the circle of life a complex yes: on one hand we may weep for loss of life, but we also can accept it from the standpoint of the whole. This complex ‘yes’ might also entail an awareness of a certain level of contradiction (to the ontology of connectedness) in one’s own given lifeway. For example, the farmer in this poem most likely includes some ‘industrialized’ operations (chemicals, mechanical pickers) in his line of work. So, while he attempts to hunt and to relate to the deer in non-industrial ways, he cannot always act non-industrially. Still he recognizes the importance of not treating the physical world – the uniquenesses of the ‘place’ around him – as merely replicable abstractions. By demonstrating the complexity involved in the affirmation of the ‘circle of life,’ Monesson reveals the sacredness or spiritual power inherent to the recognition of a ‘life-force’ or [[spirit]] in *all*.

Another poem from *Wordspinners*, “Autumn Mystery” by Jean Anderson (1994), offers an equivalently compelling example of a [[spirit]] that links humans and the rest of creation. The poem begins with the speaker noticing something strange in the air, “tiny Indian smoke signals,” that seem to be sending out an urgent message. On further investigation the speaker discovers that the “smoke signals” are really small clouds formed by a tiny sparrow “chirping its message” into the cold air from a branch of a blueberry bush. The poem is striking in its adherence to an intimate-knowing analytic for a number of reasons. First, the allusion to Native American traditions: Native or indigenous traditions of the world, research indicates, are more ‘in tune’ with the rhythms of the earth, and include the recognition of ‘spirit’ or ‘spirits’ in all of the natural world (Grim 1998). Because such

indigenous traditions are acknowledged as 'deeply' connected with the earth in ways that other worldviews may not be, environmental theorists often talk of creating a way of life that mimics native peoples' connectedness (Easterbrook in Foltz 2003, 56). Some, of course, have argued that not only are these theorists hopelessly idealistic, but they create a false image of native peoples that is dangerously uncritical. Obviously there have been many challenges to the idea of the "ecological primitive" from within and outside the environmental community. I am not suggesting here that the analytic of intimate knowing is about mimicry of native spirituality, nor would I suggest romanticization of Native American traditions. However, that does not mean that the indigenous idea of spirit-in-nature can be ignored; it should be critically engaged. Allusion to indigenous culture functions in this case as a subtle reminder that there are alternative perspectives or paradigms from which to evaluate one's physical surroundings.

Second, the poem clearly demonstrates an attempt at communication or communion with land. The speaker notices "smoke signals" rising and calling an "urgent message" that "begs interest and reply." The poet is not explicit about what the significance of this "visual morse code" might be. The only intimation is that it comes from a sparrow. Perhaps, then, it is just this that is significant; that is, perhaps the "urgent message" is the need to listen to the natural world, to build a mutual awareness between nature and humanity. Or, perhaps the message goes further. The very fact that the "smoke signals" come from the exhalations of the sparrow in the cold air indicates a linkage between human and non-human that borders on the ontological. [[Spirit]] or breath is a linking word between matter and consciousness. The speaker in "Autumn Mystery" describes the sparrow with self-reflection: "it puffs of warm breath, as vital as my own." Thus, breath could be read as a signifying word for an underlying "oneness" of creation that is brought about by a life-force that runs through the material world. The link between human and sparrow found in the life-force metaphor of breath is the "Autumn Mystery," the mystery of life.

Spoken word

In analyzing the spoken word, I focus on the descriptions that local residents present of their interaction with the land⁸. The following examples come from transcriptions of the interviews and focus groups I organized as a part of research on culture and agriculture in Burlington County. In the interviews, I did not express my interest in ideas of [[spirit]], depth, mystery, sacredness, or ‘spirituality.’ All of the quotations I use in this analysis are taken from conversations in which my probing never touches on the concept of intimate knowing nor uses the vocabulary associated with the analytic. I did this because I wanted to see if Burlington County residents would find these ideas on their own.

There are numerous cases from Burlington County in which traces of [[spirit]] thinking emerge. Perhaps the most poignant expressions of inspirational [[spirit]] found in ‘place’ come from my interview with a BCC Professor of Biology. This professor, an administrator-turned-cranberry farmer who now teaches at Burlington County College, expresses great interest in the topic of cultural connectedness to the land. He describes his fifteen years as a Pine Barrens berry grower as a profound experience. He tells of his gradual development of an intimate relationship with his land in which he comes to a full attentiveness and appreciation of the seasonal cycles of the cranberry bogs. During our conversations, the professor begins to recall his experience of being raised a Roman Catholic. He apologizes for going “off topic” when he muses:

Where did Christianity fail me? Well, one of its failings is that it was never really in touch with the natural rhythms (Professor of Biology 2004).

After his experience as a cranberry farmer, these natural rhythms seem like ‘hallowed’ texts to this professor – not in the sense of some ethereal spirituality (divinity from above), but in the sense of something sacred right in the very land he tended. He recalls that the predecessors of Roman Catholicism were more in touch with natural cycles:

The priests of the Romans were [in touch] . . . and yet, somehow they lost that basic rhythm that is so much a part of the seasons and agriculture. Birth, Death,

⁸ To reiterate, I use ‘land’ the way that Thoreau and Aldo Leopold use land – to mean not simply the soil but all the things “on” and in it, or more pointedly, all things that come from it and return to it.

Resurrection – is an agricultural allusion. There are [many] Christian myths that are agriculturally connected (Professor of Biology 2004).

The professor continues his reflection on his own spiritual connectedness with the land in anticipating his life after retirement from teaching:

I look forward to . . . spend[ing] some time among the Native Americans because some of those people have a sense of agriculture, land, and seasonality that is probably unparalleled . . . I came late [to an understanding of the land and the seasons]. I was in public health before farming, an administrator in a three-piece suit; I didn't have that sense of seasonal rhythm until I got to the farm (Professor of Biology 2004).

He comments that there are others around the world, especially subsistence farmers and hunters and gatherers who still have an internal sense of the land's rhythms, but for the most part he understands awareness of the land's cycles as an integral lesson that humans have lost.

This biology professor's commentary is moving, yet it still leaves the listener with many unanswered questions as to the potentiality of 'intimate knowing' in South Jersey. First, from within the analytic of intimate knowing, we might question the view itself that modern society does not know an intimate sense of belonging to the land. Clearly, the professor, years ago when working as an administrator, experienced no sense of belonging to the land. In taking the "opportunity of a lifetime" to manage a cranberry farm, he was able to locate a [[spirit]] in the physical world he did not know before. Yet, perhaps he does not speak for many area residents when he says that "we" have lost an awareness of the land's cycles as integral part of human existence. Perhaps there are others who sense a "deep" belonging to the land, but who struggle for various reasons to "live up to it" and to express it without structures and rituals in place. The professor suggests that the continual destruction of ecology and *unique* (place-based) landscape indicates a severe and thorough disconnect between residents and land; but the reality may be more in-between.

From outside of the analytic of intimate knowing we find another unanswered question in the professor's commentary. He offers a rather romantic view of farming after becoming disillusioned with the corporate world. Thus, his remarks set up a dichotomy

between the world of the larger economy, where money, three-piece suits, and office jobs are the norm, and the world of his small farm, where there are crops, corduroys, and cranberry bogs. One may wonder whether other area farmers share such a view. South Jersey's farmers must interact with the world of the larger economy in order to run viable family businesses. In addition, the world of the larger economy has brought the value of their land to soaring heights in recent years. The question is, do they see this world as corrupt and would they implicate it, with "its" destruction of landscape and ecology, as leading to a society-level disconnection with the land?

The answers to these questions are complex. Yet it is important to pursue, for the promise of intimate knowing rests on there being definite signs that this professor is not the only farmer (or ex-farmer) who thinks along these lines. In my own interactions with other South Jersey farmers, each one has indicated either an understanding that there is wisdom to be found in the land, or that there is some [[spirit]], some inspirational sense of connectedness, that motivates farm work (beyond economic tribulations). This is ratified by the Burlington County Agricultural Agent who claims,

Farmers are much more in touch with the seasons and the land. In the springtime or after a rain they cannot wait to get out there again. This connection is what makes them forget about the hardships (Burlington County Agricultural Agent 2004).

Furthermore, there is a clear sense in the agricultural community of "selling out" when a farmer gives up his land, for whatever reasons, to developers. Farmers sell out or sell over (to the larger economy) not only something 'material' in the small sense, but also some truth, wisdom, and inspirational [[spirit]] of the land and their occupation. This "selling out" is looked upon with pity, not scorn. In this way, reflecting upon the aura of the farming community in South Jersey, there does seem to be some evidence of the same kind of [[spirit]]-in-land inspiration that Kathleen DeMarco writes about in *Cranberry Queen*. For the purposes of inspiring sense of place and stewardship, the biology professor's testimony about farming rings true and is important as South Jersey tries to address the 'sustainability' of its future; farming here seems to be a way in which humans can hold on to a sense of

connectedness to the land. The sense of connection comes not because farming is entirely non-industrial and ecologically sound, but because (as Wendell Berry might put it) the small-scale keeps one's lifework within the reach of affection, within the human-scaled realm of what can be *known* and appreciated. In the case of this particular informant, then, the small farm was a gateway to an ontology of connectedness -- a grounding for care of the land -- which he was able to retain as a college professor even after his days as a farmer were through.

Of course, agriculture is not the only gateway available to those who search to express an *ideal* of connectedness to the land. For example, one Burlington County College fine arts professor makes use of the metaphor of the skies -- the sun and the stars -- in her account of experiences with the natural world. She says the skies are very important metaphorically in art, and she talks of monuments across the globe that are dedicated to seeing, appreciating, and becoming attentive to the skies. In Burlington County, she says that her own students complain of not being able to fully see the skies; air and light pollution make it difficult to see more than a few stars. Along these lines, the fine arts professor indicates that the skies and stars provide important symbolism, working to signify not some 'higher' ethereal spirituality but rather a grounded exposure of the landscape-level difficulties of finding [[spirit]] in the physical world (Professor of Fine Arts 2004).

The use of stars as metaphor in art for intimacy with one's surroundings may be useful for students who already find a sense of self-identity in land, nature or ecology. However, what of those many students who find self-identity and *inspiration* (both artistic and behavioral) elsewhere? Certainly the "global mix" of Burlington County allows for the presence of many non-ecological, non-place-based communities and commodities in which people find ways of expression. The BCC fine arts professor gives one example of a student drawing upon a crumpled Budweiser Beer can for inspiration. As an environmentalist, she might suggest that such forms of inspiration are inferior, but, as an artist, she feels unable to make such a judgement. Not everyone will identify with the land in the way that

environmentalists do. For practical purposes it seems that 'intimate knowing' must engage with the reality of inspiration in non-place-based communities, perhaps even inspiration from commodities, in order to become a 'meaningful' all-around dialogue.

And, this brings up another dilemma for the reality of intimate knowing. Burlington County is a place of mobility and transience. While there are a number of families (especially farming families) who have remained in the county for generations, over the decades there has also been a constant flux of residents coming out and going in. This dynamism maintains a cultural mix, which many residents value whether or not these cultures demonstrate an appreciation of the ecological complexities of place. This leaves one to wonder, is there a way to foster awareness of an integral union of self with nature/physical surroundings that makes room for global cultural mixing and migration? Newcomers to the region do not and cannot know land and place in the same way that old-timers do. Can they still be "led" to discover an inspirational ontology of connectedness, or does intimate knowing exclude cultural diversity and migration?

These are important questions still to be communally negotiated in context, in the local setting of Burlington County. Meanwhile, a number of other area educators continue to think of ways to embed local culture in regional ecology and promote land stewardship:

One philosophy professor, who has reworked his Western and Eastern courses to include holistic and ecological thinking at all levels, sums it up with the idea, "We are not walking on the land; we are the land walking" (Professor of Philosophy 2004).

Another educator, a naturalist and outreach coordinator for the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, suggests that his kind of work -- organizing direct human contact with local soils, plants, and streams -- may be crucial in advancing an understanding of the connectedness of people and land:

My biggest job . . . [is] to get people out there, in the woods, on a canoe trip, traipsing through a mucky pond. Then my job is done, really. I have put them face to face with the ultimate teacher and I just stand back and guide a bit (Director of Outreach, PPA 2004).

In referring to nature as ‘the ultimate teacher,’ this informant indicates understandings of human existence that parallel ideas of ‘intimate knowing.’ Certainly, in his cosmogony, if there is an ultimate truth or life lesson to be grasped, it would come through physical interaction with one's surrounding environment. Of course, this informant is an environmentalist by choice and trade. His emphasis on a pristine, untouched version of “nature” may count as evidence that the intimate knowing dialogue appears quite limited to environmental circles. This is problematic not only because it may limit the scope of the dialogue but because it can render some seemingly innocuous ideas objectionable.

For example, the idea that “we are the land walking,” while conceived to be universally agreeable, could become disagreeable in South Jersey if it were to be associated only with elite circles of environmentalists, farmer-gentry, and local scholars. This is not to say that these circles are doing “wrong,” but simply that they are class-based and ideologically-bound. South Jersey would limit the possibility of intimate knowing if the dialogue were to remain within circles of a few, who insisted that others be brought to 'their' understandings of ‘place.’ In other words, unless the concept of intimate knowing finds a wider breadth of cultural expression, the dialogue will remain limited, and so too will its potentials for inspiring stewardship. Of course, in trying to find this wider breadth South Jersey need not negate the ideas of local agricultural and environmental circles. However, residents must begin to instigate wide-spread questioning of landscape-level and community-level trends.

Conclusions

On the very localized level of Burlington County this chapter has examined the potentials of a new analytic that hopes to inspire ecological attentiveness and civic cohesion by making room for the (broadly) ‘spiritual’ realm – the realm of ontological and epistemological questioning. The analytic allows for the exploration of cultural texts along

the lines of ‘intimate knowing’ – a concept that involves a keen awareness of humanity’s connectedness with all else which sits on and makes up the “land.” In doing so, it creates a different sort of culturally-reflective dialogue (than the civic agriculture dialogue) which can be passed and negotiated in varied community settings. The dialogue invites local residents to question whether they can find [[spirit]] in the physical world that surrounds them. This location of [[spirit]] need not refer to the sacred or a divine being, but essentially implies the finding of a powerful, motivational sense of connectedness with nature. “Spirit” then is suggestive not so much of the supernatural but of the very real inspiration that many, over centuries have found by turning to nature with their questions of “what is life all about?” or (as Wendell Berry has put it) “What are People For?” In this way, the dialogue of intimate knowing becomes a way of simultaneously inspiring ‘resistance’ to society-level and landscape-level trends that seem to be harming sense of place and stewardship, and inviting people to negotiate together why, how, and when these trends can be harmful.

In Burlington County, Southern New Jersey, an area of heightened mobility and increased cultural diversity, we do find evidence of [[spirit]] or a leaning towards an ontology of connectedness in cultural texts which refer directly to life within this one given local context. These come in both the written and spoken word in Burlington County and reveal that in at least a few social circles an intimate knowing dialogue could fit quite effectively. However, critical examination of the texts also reveals the potential for obstructive limitations to be placed on the dialogue. In this examination, we have found suggestions of intimate knowing that are for the most part associated with either long-term engagement with farm life or frequent physical interaction with a pristine (human untouched) nature. This could mean that, much as we saw with the ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue in Chapter Four, the ‘intimate knowing’ dialogue is likely to be confined to only the kinds of social groups that, in certain ways, align themselves with an interest in farm, land, and/or ecology. Along these lines, one must be careful not only of romanticization of farming and rural ways-of-life, but also, and more importantly, of how narrow views of nature (and agriculture) limit the social context within which intimate knowing may be relevant. If “nature,” as a concept in dialogue, can

come to also include urban and suburban places and people more fully, then [[spirit]] would seem to have much wider potential for becoming a clear motivational force within every local ethos.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

This thesis began with the premise that a recent cultural turn within the sub-field of agricultural geography offers some fresh and constructive ideas to advance social care of the land. This may be especially true when, I argued, the cultural turn is examined as part of a broader shift in academia as a whole, a shift toward participatory-type research, localized ways-of knowing, and ‘soft’, dialogic learning. Accordingly, in Chapter Two, I explored the theories and thought processes within agricultural geography that have provided researchers a way to speak to what might be called a ‘holistic attentiveness to agriculture.’ In particular, Chapter Two examined that evolution of thought within geography that has made way for an active, participatory, society-level means of addressing “wholeness” in terms of the union of people, land, and community. I uncovered the prospect of a new, applied, cultural kind of geographic research. Then, in the third chapter I explored the possibilities of this new kind of research for development or community planning. I argued the importance of both critical and imaginative thinking and gave a rationale for the idea of social transformation through dialogue. Building on this, I then pieced together the idea of holistic attentiveness to agriculture with the idea of transformational learning to see how a method called Deep-Dialogue might help to bring abstract ideas into play on a local level. Here I made the case that Deep-Dialogue offers a life-rooted way to work out the concept of wholeness, and that agriculturally-based deep dialogue seems a particularly effective way to encourage the local dialectics of “planning through learning” and “learning through planning.”

Finally, in the fourth and fifth chapters, I put this dialogic method into action, offering a concrete example of what might be meant by applied, cultural research in agricultural geography. I test out an active, pedagogical approach to ecological and community planning in the context of Burlington County, southern New Jersey. I chose this area as a case study for the trial not only because it is my home county, but also because current landscape-level and community-level trends are in need of reassessment here. Many residents identify the County as in need of greater eco-social ‘care.’ Thus, not only is the test

of applied agri-*cultural* research within Burlington County meant to give insight into methods within agricultural geography, but it also is meant to provide South Jersey residents with tools to begin a transformation of the ethos of their homeplace.

In South Jersey I have presented these tools for transformation in the form of intermingling dialogues, a primary and a secondary: First, the primary dialogue, worked out in Chapter Four, which we might call the ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue (and which evolved to become the January 8, 2005 community forum, “Re-connecting Our Lives to the Land,”), and second, the resultant (yet still rather latent) dialogue worked out in Chapter Five, which we might call the ‘intimate knowing’ dialogue and which emerges from textual analysis to offer a possible ontological/epistemological approach to reconnection with the land. In my empirical investigation, these two dialogues undoubtedly show a certain bias that I brought to my work, both as a researcher and South Jersey native. Throughout my research I have had influence on topics of discussion, lines of questioning, and ways of deconstruction. Nevertheless, in entering into dialogue with South Jersey educators and with South Jersey residents at the January 8 community forum, I also began to open new analytical spaces that can be taken in multiple directions, outside my influence or control. In this way, the fact that the dialogues in their current form contain my biases does not mean that they will continue along the specific lines that I have suggested as they are passed on and negotiated by wider groups in South Jersey.

However, the two intermingling dialogues do contain general underlying themes, important to grappling with “wholeness” through agriculture, which could very well continue as South Jersey educators/leaders now carry on this community work. For example, both of these two dialogues, in different ways, examine the idea of human *relationality*. That is, they examine the idea that humans are relational beings by nature and that, because of this, care of ‘others’ must be on some level inherent to who we are. The dialogues work subtly to portray the idea of relationality as a crucial *civic* issue, especially because reflection on this kind of suggestion invites communitarian instead of individualistic thinking. In an understated way,

both dialogues bid participants to begin to negotiate a ‘level’ or an understanding of relationality that might be acceptable to all. Indeed, in calling people to question and move beyond current levels of civic engagement in South Jersey (in regard to issues of agriculture, land, and landscape), these dialogues work indirectly to promote the search for common ground on the issue of local community relations. In this way, South Jersey can begin to weave a definitive sense of care and an increased propensity toward civic interaction into the area’s overall ethos.

Along similar lines, both the ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue and the ‘intimate knowing’ dialogue examine the issue of social positionality, particularly social positionality to the land. The dialogues examine our social positioning or distancing from all of the human, animal, plant, and material ‘others’ that make up the ‘land.’ The dialogues challenge us about connectedness in view of present levels of social distance from people, land, and community. Are there realistic ways to position ourselves closer to the ‘land’, and is this important to the future of our area? In urging South Jersey residents to consider such questions the dialogues invite the formation of a new regional objective of enhanced sense of place and stewardship. They ask us to imagine what a modern day attentiveness to the unity of people-land-community might look like. This is especially important when we combine the issue of social *positionality* with the previous idea of *relationality*. When we mingle these issues in dialogue, we find that we are able to make room for a vision of civic relations or ‘care’ that extends beyond human ‘others’ to the whole of the people-land-community union in South Jersey. This vision, articulated by numerous South Jersey educational leaders and local residents at the January 8th forum, is a starting point for a possible, realistic, community-level transformation of *ethos* – of consciousness and action – in the region.

Beyond these shared, underlying themes each of the two dialogues that I present in Chapter Four and Five offer important specific insights about wholeness and the use of a holistic focus on agriculture for community planning. For instance, the primary dialogue on ‘civic agriculture’ and ‘re-connecting lives to the land’ has demonstrated the possibility of

exploratory engagement with emotions such as nostalgia, pride, affection, and even fear, all of which have been associated with the South Jersey 'garden' landscape. The dialogue coupled this exploratory engagement of emotions with a critical analysis of knowledge, beliefs, and opinions about the local area. In this way, the dialogue is both visionary and realistic. Through the dialogue we have recognized a variety of emotional/intellectual sources of inspiration that underlie local culture and that may be used to encourage stewardship of the people-land-community union. This may happen in conversation or in other "dia-logic" patterns of living (ritual, for example). However, the beliefs and opinions such emotions inspire must also be critically engaged in order to pull out practical ways to move forward with communal and individual desires for change. In dialogue South Jersey educators and I have revealed the need to insist upon questioning feelings and understandings of 'place' for the purposes of pragmatic community planning.

Beyond the primary dialogue on 'civic agriculture' and 're-connecting lives to the land' the emergent 'intimate knowing' dialogue has been developed as a potentially concurrent conversation which identifies ontological questioning as an alternative source of energy and inspiration. The dialogue tries for a certain neutrality and innocence in regard to the supposed contrast between, on the one hand, 'religious' or 'spiritual' beliefs, and on the other, 'secular' worldviews, by suggesting that a general commonality exists in human community's inherent connectedness with the land (and each other). It struggles to find ways of speaking to the human-land relationship that make room for multiple varieties of new inspiration, and in doing so to offer a sort of pragmatism in regard to questions of "ultimate reality." The dialogue suggests that South Jersey may be able to 'capitalize' on the ontological grounding for care of the land that the position of connectedness invites. As people begin to appreciate what it could mean to know the land 'intimately,' they may uncover a 'new' urge to care for it in its eco-systemic whole. Along these lines, the dialogue's heavy use of (cultural) textual example points out that the discovery of ways to embrace such 'intimate knowledge' of the land has led many individuals to an increased

attentiveness to human impacts on the land-ecology. Furthermore, the dialogue has also used textual examples to emphasize that agriculture, both in the broader world and in the specific context of South Jersey, can be important to such discovery. In this way, the dialogue offers an alternative *framework of connectedness* that is built upon communitarian thinking, but that tries to remain neutral or generic enough to include all residents in its epistemic approach.

I emphasize “framework of connectedness” here because I want to make the point that both of the intermingling dialogues presented in this thesis work to help set up alternative mental frameworks for the analytical and literal reconstruction of local society. In both dialogues we move from “deconstruction” to reconstruction with some fluidity and ease. I see this contribution of new frameworks as key to the outcomes of this thesis both for the communities of South Jersey and for general understandings of applied research within agricultural geography. In their groundbreaking sociological work, *Habits of the Heart*, social scientist Robert Bellah and co-authors explain that “American cultural traditions define personality, achievement, and the purpose of human life in ways that are suspended in glorious but terrifying isolation” (Bellah et al 1985, 6). Greater society in the United States, *Habits of the Heart* argues, no longer has any wider framework of purpose or belief (beyond the individual self) to justify ‘values’ or ‘priorities.’ This would include actions of stewardship and care for the ‘others’ of people, land, and community. Bellah et al write that in today’s society, “what is good is what one finds [personally] rewarding” (Bellah et al 1985, 6). This individualized basis for goodness and good behavior leaves people disconnected from each other and from the land on numerous levels.

Of course, we have seen in the previous pages on South Jersey that sometimes such individualism can still be useful in promoting an eco-social reality of ‘care.’ This is true because some local residents clearly *do* find actions of land stewardship rewarding. Many residents probably already include some level of stewardship and care of others in their individual frameworks of purpose. However, we also note that full acceptance of individualism (on a level of overall culture or ethos) may constrict civic participation in

regard to stewardship because there are many others who do not recognize care of local people and place as significant to their lives. Indeed, it seems that at least for the sake of the future, activities of ‘sustainability’ and ‘stewardship’ need to be more than just matters of personal preference within our cultural traditions. Although the findings of this research would certainly not lead me to suggest an abandonment of the American ideal of individualism, it seems that South Jersey could benefit from a cultural transformation that encourages a higher level of communitarian thinking.

Consequently, this thesis has attempted to provide wider-than-individualist frameworks for justifying such actions. These alternate frameworks, expressed both in the primary dialogue on civic agriculture and in the emergent intimate knowing dialogue, maintain that a starting place for thought and judgment can be found on the level of community. Both dialogues find different ways to contend that if local people can realize (negotiate) some level of truth, concerning how it is natural and rational to relate to and to care for a surrounding community of ‘others,’ then we can use this as a basic commonality upon which to construct a *shared* framework of purpose. In offering this idea for a wider, community-level framework of purpose, this thesis seeks to contribute to the renovation of the total local ethos. If such a framework takes root in South Jersey, other local habits of thought and action as well as the physical appearance of local land and landscape should begin to experience transformation.

Certainly, both the primary ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue and the emergent ‘intimate knowing’ dialogue are aimed at influencing ethos in this way. They both provide communities with ways of actively engaging with the notion of “wholeness.” Of course, both dialogues recognize ethos change as a lengthy dialectical process. Dialogic interactions are meant to produce new thoughts, which can, in turn, generate new actions and perhaps concrete changes; these actions and changes then come back to influence subsequent dialogue because they bring in different concerns arising out of a changed environment. This happens

over time and, naturally, such a dialectic of transformation is not guaranteed. Yet it is a way forward and rekindles hope.

Along these lines, Burlington County educators and residents at the community forum have taken a first step in the creation of a vision for South Jersey, complete with numerous task-specific strategies for forward moving. Educators and residents also have helped to identify a number of crucial obstacles to dialogue-based transformation in South Jersey. These obstacles include both society-level concerns as well as personal objections to dialogue-based transformation, which make the current advancement of dialogue more difficult. For example, we have seen that some educators do not think transformation is possible given current mainstream materialism and individualistic attitudes toward place. Transformation is too utopian; there is no way to change the fact that many suburbanites are more concerned with having their luxury houses and sprawling manicured lawns than with examining the eco-social ramifications of these choices. Other educators are simply not interested in helping. Enhancing stewardship and sense of place on a communal level does not matter to them. Civic engagement and cultural reflection are, in their conception, luxuries that they and other South Jersey residents (their 'students') do not need. In addition, a few others are almost fearful of cultural reflection. Such an attitude would suggest that any dialogue with an agenda of change will necessarily be perceived by some as radical and thus unacceptable. Yet these are perhaps average, standard limitations, to be expected in any region if only because of the complexities of who is responsible and how things get done.

A more remarkable limitation comes from those who *do* see possibility for transformation in cultural reflection. Indeed, a major weakness for the vision of transformation through dialogue can be found not in the agriculture-based dialogic method itself nor with the handful of educational leaders who have (passively) rejected my two specific dialogues, but rather with those who have chosen to join the 'initiative'. The educators and residents of South Jersey who have accepted the idea of using dialogue on agriculture for cultural transformation have accepted it because they see its potential for

helping to protect and uphold what they value in this ‘place.’ Thus, they are *invested* in the dialogue. This, of course, is useful because it provides needed energy for advancement. Still, critical examination of the commentary from many enthusiastic respondents reveals ways in which a variety of social groups could be (inadvertently) excluded from dialogue. Many local educators and residents tend to address issues of agriculture, sustainability, and stewardship within the context of specific agendas, which may be shared by many in South Jersey but not by all. They get ‘on board’ but not in a holistic way, having habits of fragmentation, partisanship, and sectarianism.

Indeed, both the primary ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue and the emergent ‘intimate knowing’ dialogue have been built to be ‘neutral’ or ‘unanimous’ but that does not hide the fact that many of the key players today – the educational leaders that I have identified as well as the participants in the community forum – consider themselves as members of one or another rather exclusive circles (i.e. as environmentalists, members of the agricultural community, farmer-gentry, county fathers, or old-timers in the area). With the advancement of the dialogue now in their hands, local educators and residents will have to find ways to expand the dialogue to wider social circles. This expansion should take into consideration the need to achieve a greater diversity along lines of class and race. In this research I was not able to find an interview pool that allowed for such diversity. Further research might begin by examining whether or not there are important cultural features linked to the less-represented groups, which would be crucial for the acceptance of a ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue in such circles.

Yet, beyond ensuring adequate representation in reference to the typical social divisions of race and class, my dialogic research points to the possibility of inadvertent exclusion of certain other social groups of what might be described as our contemporary ‘mosaic culture.’ These groups seem to define themselves according to details like age, interests, occupation, and, in general, ‘lifestyles,’ in ways that may cut across racial and economic boundaries. Such fragmented groups are more difficult to isolate, but my

groundwork attempt to begin dialogue in South Jersey seems to indicate some crucial absences along such lines. In South Jersey then, as elsewhere, leaders of an ongoing ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue need to discover not only how to let absent ‘groups’ know they are included (for this may be rather obvious) but also how to actually *involve* individuals from these groups in dialogue. What would motivate the non-motivated to join the dialogue? What (about ‘civic agriculture’) would interest those who claim to have no interest (in ‘civic agriculture’)? In Burlington County, BCC professors seem to offer some expertise on this issue, commenting often that “many of [their] students are just not interested,” or that “many people just don’t think in these ways.” A simple call to join dialogue or to partake in a community forum would be lost on them.

Of course, one suggestion (for motivating the un-motivated) that this research might point to is the notion of reaching what I call a “critical mass.” Along these lines, South Jersey educators might choose to use the January 8 community forum as a model, recognizing that the forum’s achievement of a critical mass of people and ‘resources’ (e.g. food, services, etc.) from a wide variety of local sources can help to provide the concept of “wholeness” – and re-connection to the land – with some legitimacy on the local level. The achievement of such a critical mass seems to reach towards small changes in the overall ethos of a place, which may in turn have an effect on the extent to which people place themselves in the ‘uninterested’ or ‘unmotivated’ categories.

However, if using the forum as a model local people must also realize that the dialogic methods I present, no matter how ‘holistic’ they may sound, will not automatically or easily widen the scope of the dialogue in practice within area communities. Those who would expand the dialogue must work actively and purposely to achieve this end. Indeed, one crucial insight that this trial in applied agricultural geography points to is that in order for dialogue-on-agriculture to be eco-socially productive and proactive it cannot remain an ‘insider’ dialogue. South Jersey must struggle to find real ways of demonstrating the centrality of agriculture to all residents’ lives – the suburbanite and the ‘piney’, the farmer

and the stockbroker, the nature lover and the computer enthusiast alike. Only in this way can the introductory vision for South Jersey people, land, and community, so passionately articulated by some Burlington County educators and residents, begin to materialize.

Thus, the lessons gained from my trials in dialogic research are both positive and negative in terms of the seen promise of this new 'style' of applied agri-*cultural* geography. First, I recognize that, even for an explicitly 'life-rooted,' holistic dialogue, planned events, task-specific organization, and even a 'programmatically' orientation are often necessary. Such structure is expected in everyday community setting and is probably crucial to the potential advancement of any idea for social change. Second, I recognize the crucial role in the advancement of dialogue that Burlington County College played as a large, firmly established, 'neutral' community institution. This would lead me to suggest that perhaps on the local level, the most rewarding avenues for social change can be found within existing local socio-political structures. BCC's thorough involvement with the January 8 community forum and my attempts to advance a certain dialogue on agriculture offered a level of legitimacy to the ideas of 'civic agriculture' and 're-connecting lives to the land' that would not have otherwise been seen. This legitimacy came about not only as a result of the number of people who have now been made aware of these issues, but also with recognition of the quantity of resources that were expended on the cause. Thus it seems that even in a community dialogue, which in certain ways is aimed at surpassing issues of the so-called "market economy," money *does* talk. Local people appreciated the forum and its shared luncheon meal free of charge, and although there were probably many varied reasons for attendance, included in these was the impression that "if someone is investing so much time, money, and resources in this project, it must be important."

A third lesson gained from my agriculturally-based dialogic research is the simple recognition, stated earlier, that the inclusion of *all* social groups in dialogue is very difficult, perhaps unfeasible on the small scale within which I have worked. There were indeed crucial social groups either absent or not adequately represented during both my original interview

stage of agricultural dialogue and the resultant community forum. These social groups included, as I just pointed out, various ‘types’ or fragmented groupings that self-identify as uninterested. Yet also underrepresented were a number of ‘groups’ who have continually stressed their interest in the topics of ‘civic agriculture’ and ‘reconnecting lives to the land.’ The most significant of these was probably the under-representation of farming community itself at the January 8 community forum. Although many claimed to be there “in spirit,” and others donated their produce in place of their attendance, their absence was certainly felt and noted. This leads me to the suggestion that the ‘civic agriculture’ dialogue, as well as any other attempted community dialogue on agriculture, must grapple with the fact that involving *agriculture* is a complex task. A holistic dialogue on agriculture cannot insist upon the involvement of farmers, or demand their attendance at local gatherings, but must work slowly with the farming community, assessing their customs, practices, and networks to come up with ways in which their members can participate.

The final recognition that I find coming out of this research re-connects these first three ‘lessons’ to the original notion of “wholeness,” upon which this thesis was based. In the introduction to this work, I described wholeness as an important concept referring to an understanding of the connectedness or relatedness of oneself to all other things, including especially the land as a major source of matter, nutrients, and energy. As I continued through this thesis I tried to show that although this may be the essence of “wholeness” the concept finds ever broader and deeper meaning as it is tried out in a community setting. We have found some of this broadened and deepened meaning in South Jersey, both through my primary interview work and through the resultant community forum. Still, there is much more work to be done here. We have only witnessed the smallest first steps of the process of ethos change. In the first pages of this thesis I alluded to a “sea change” in consciousness of ecology and place that writers like Thomas Berry and Yi-Fu Tuan say is necessary in order to restore a sustainable world. I entered into dialogue with the hopes of uncovering certain ways to move forward with such transformation. Yet, I recognize at the end of this work that

the certainty of change cannot be recognized in months, years, or even decades. Change comes in small pieces – uneven, disjointed, and sometimes delicate. As researchers we must learn to be content with such small results.

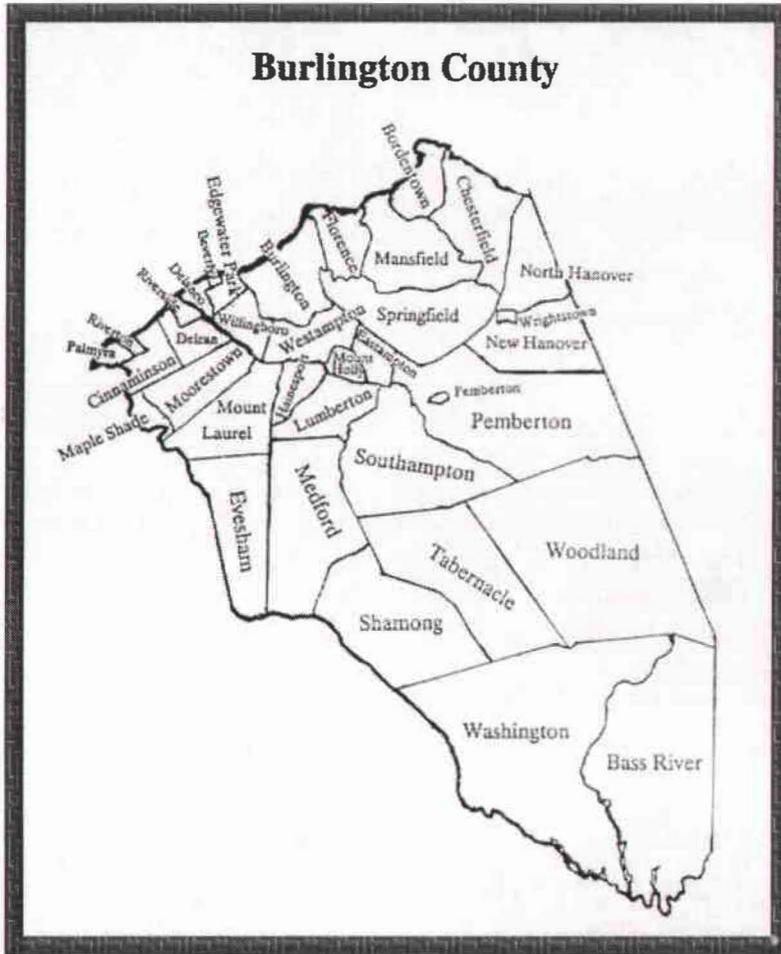
Appendix 1

List of Job-titles of Interviewed Educational Leaders

- Program Coordinator, Pinelands Institute for Natural and Environmental Studies (PINES)
- Student Activities Coordinator, Burlington County College
- Assistant Professor of English
- Professor of Philosophy
- County Clerk and Administrator
- Director of Burlington County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs
- Operations Manager, Burlington County College Radio
- Naturalist, Pinelands Preservation Alliance
- Professor of Psychology and Sociology, Burlington County College
- Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Burlington County College
- Education Coordinator, Pinelands Commission
- Director of Libraries, Burlington County College
- Naturalist and Singer/Songwriter
- Vice President, Burlington County College
- Professor of Economics, Burlington County College
- Burlington County Agricultural Agent
- Food Sciences Academic Program Director, Burlington County College
- Professor of Biology, Burlington County College
- Professor of Chemistry, Burlington County College
- Professor of Environmental Science, Burlington County College
- Assistant Professor of Biology, Burlington County College
- Professor of Fine Arts, Burlington County College
- Assistant Professor of Geology, Burlington County College
- Events and Volunteer Programs Coordinator, Whitesbog Preservation Trust
- Farmer, Board Member, and Original Owner, Whitesbog Preservation Trust
- Burlington County Director of Economic Development and Regional Planning
- President, Pinelands Preservation Alliance
- Farmer, retired Burlington County College Board Member
- Head Coordinator, Burlington County Farm Fair
- Coordinator, Burlington County Farm Fair
- Scientist, Pinelands Commission

Appendix 2

Municipal Map and New Jersey Locator Map of Burlington County



map a. Burlington County's diverse municipalities
(Image from www.co.burlington.nj.us/departments/resource)



map b. The placement of Burlington County in New Jersey
(Image from freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/.../nj_map3.jpg)

Appendix 3

a. Semi-structured interview sample questions: divided by operational categories

Interview Operational Categories

1. Understandings and visions of cultural localism
 - How do you as an educator understand sense of place in SJ and what does agriculture have to do with it?
 - What does it mean to you to be attentive to place? Is it important?
 - Do you think Burlington County residents self-identify with the county as their homeplace?
 - Do you think the garden state ideal (the working family farm) is valued as part of our regional culture?
 - What are the opportunities and barriers to linking agriculture and sense of place together?
 - What would it mean for South Jersey to deepen its cultural attentiveness to place?
 - What are the benefits to South Jersey you see coming as a result of a deepened sense of place?
2. Current situation and status of programs
 - Do the classes you teach / programs you run have a connection to South Jersey?
 - Does this connection involve regional small-scale farming?
 - In what ways is your institution encouraging such a connection?
 - Do you know of other classes or programs where this connection is more encouraged?
 - What is the day-to-day style of your teaching?
 - Are there experiential learning components to your classes or do you take trips outside the classroom?
 - What kind of feedback do you receive from the students in regard to these techniques?
3. Willingness and potential to increase the relative connectedness of programs with local agriculture:
 - Can you foresee changes that would improve students' self-identification with the region?
 - Would these be changes to the curriculum of classes or programs, changes to the educational techniques of professors, and/or changes to the overall approach of your 'institution'?
 - How would you like to improve or enhance the connection of sense of place and agriculture in 'teaching'?
 - Do you see value in focusing on the agricultural seasonal round in 'teaching' and 'learning'?

b. Semi-structured interview sample questions: divided by civic agriculture themes

1. Place-based perceptual ecology: How attentive are we to the natural world and agricultural cycles in Burlington County? What would it mean for people in this area to focus on their perceptual ecologies of South Jersey?
2. Seasonal rounds: What do the seasons here mean to you as a resident and educator? Do you think as a whole we are attentive to the landscape changes from summer to fall, winter to spring? What does this have to do with our identities and the way we think?
3. Agriculture across the curriculum: What does the county's seasonal agricultural rounds have to do with what we teach, in area schools (BCC) or in outreach programs? What further meanings could be given to 'agriculture across the curriculum'?
4. Eating as an agricultural act: The need to cultivate food is our link to the natural world, and eating completes the cycle. How aware are we of these linkages in South Jersey?
5. Localism through food and farm: Can cultural attention to food and farm deepen our affection for the ecological and social intricacies of the 'place' in which we dwell?
6. Cultural reflection: How might our identity (perhaps as citizens of the 'Garden State'?) be transformed by answering the above questions together?

Appendix 4

a. Copy of Civic Agriculture Flyer

A new initiative for Civic Agriculture in Southern New Jersey

Announcing an emerging dialogue for the Burlington County region that relates to the following topics:

- **Place-based perceptual ecology**
How attentive are we to the natural world and agricultural cycles in Burlington County?
- **Seasonal rounds**
Our landscape changes vividly and productively from summer to fall, winter to spring. What does this have to do with our identities and the way we think, i.e. our mental ecologies?
- **Agriculture across the curriculum**
What might the county's seasonal agricultural rounds have to do with what we teach, in our schools and in our outreach programs?
- **Eating as an agricultural act**
The need to cultivate food is our link to the natural world, and eating completes the cycle. How aware are we of these linkages?
- **Localism through food and farm**
Can cultural attention to food and farm deepen our affection for the ecological and social intricacies of the 'place' in which we dwell?
- **Cultural reflection (as it relates to the above)**
How might our identity (as citizens of the 'Garden State'?) be transformed by answering the above questions together?

You are invited to become part of this dialogue. Any level of participation is encouraged. Discussions will be active all summer and will culminate in a community forum scheduled at Burlington County College for January 8, 2005.

If interested please contact Allison Hayes-Conroy at [civicagriculture @ yahoo.com](mailto:civicagriculture@yahoo.com)



Burlington County Culture
and Agriculture:

RE-CONNECTING OUR LIVES TO THE LAND

Saturday, January 8, 2005

Snow Date: Saturday, January 15

Tentative Schedule:

Events are in Parker Center
Dining Hall unless noted

- 9:30 Arrival and coffee
- 9:45 Welcome
Representatives of the Administration, Faculty and Student Body of Burlington County College welcome the gathered community.
- 10:00 Remarks on the Theme
Allison Hayes-Conroy
with Jessica Hayes-Conroy
Local co-authors of South Jersey Under the Stars: Essays on Culture, Agriculture and Place (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005) talk about their book and its relation to our theme.
- 10:20 Panel
A panel of farmers, faculty (from a variety of disciplines), and others respond to topics generated by the theme, and open a dialogue among each other.

- 11:00 Breakout Groups
Participants divide into 5 breakout groups according to interest in the various topics. Locations: (1) Gallery, (2) Private Dining Room, (3) Cranberry Room, (4) and (5) remain in dining center.

- Noon Brief Group Reports
Everyone reconvenes, and a spokesperson for each group reports back to the whole community on ideas generated during the discussion.

- 12:30 Lunch
We come together in a shared meal, including locally grown foods.

- 1:30 Keynote Address
A prominent speaker (TBA) addresses the broader vision for re-connecting our lives to the land in the 21st century, and also gives suggestions as to where we might go from here.

- 2:15 Optional trip to Whitesbog
Weather permitting, those who are interested travel by private cars to nearby Whitesbog village for a meditative walk.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Call Francis Conroy at
(856) 222-9311
or (609) 894-9311, extension 1620

Email: fconroy@bcc.edu or civica-griculture@yahoo.com

TO RESERVE YOUR SPOT:

Fill out the postage paid postcard
below and drop in the mail.

b. Copy of Forum Brochure

Yes, I plan to attend on Saturday, January 8. Please fill out the following information, and mail back this postage-paid postcard.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone _____

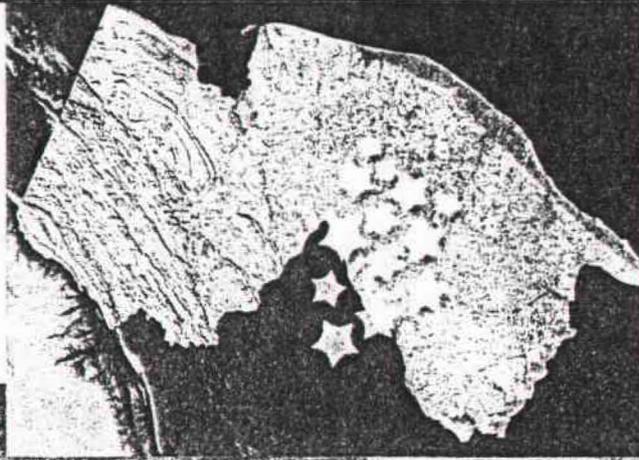
THEME: The State of New Jersey's new promotional brochure suggests we are still the Garden State. Yet in the last few decades, with the onset of 'globalization,' identification with the land in Burlington County has diminished. What are the possibilities of reversing this? Is it time for a new identification with local land, rooted in the new particularities of a world that may require us to "think globally," but also needs care and action in every beloved local place?

Tentative Topics for Breakout Groups:

1. Seasonal awareness:
How do we evaluate our agriculture-based festivals (blueberry, cranberry) and other events in terms of their civic educational potential?
2. Farming in the suburbs:
In an environment of rapid landscape change, how can we re-connect with the civic importance of agriculture?
3. Agriculture across the curriculum:
In literature, philosophy, economics, etc., how might the land and farmers re-emerge as central to our 21st century culture?
4. Eating as an agricultural act:
How can we support sustainable local food systems in our region? How important is 'organic' food?
5. Food security:
In the tradition of World War II victory gardens, how might local agriculture be central to security in a post 9/11 era?

Burlington County Culture and Agriculture:

RE-CONNECTING OUR LIVES TO THE LAND



A community forum, with its focus on our farmers and educators, this gathering is intended as a chance to connect with each other and to the land in new ways. Our map topics "South Jersey under the Stars" were in danger of being the stars, the locally popular and national events that guide us? How can Burlington County's culture, agriculture and ecology come together? How can we experience a 21st century which is a place?

Saturday, January 8, 2005

Burlington County College
Pemberton Campus
and Whitesbog Village



**BURLINGTON
COUNTY COLLEGE**

www.bcc.edu



BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 29 PEMBERTON, NJ

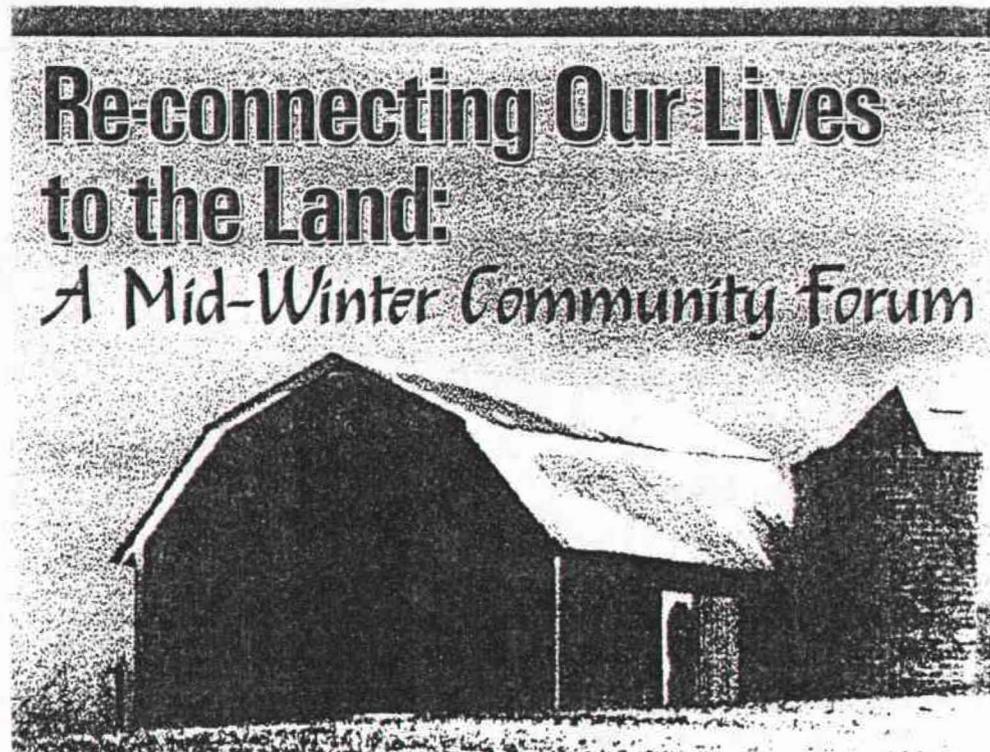
POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

PROFESSOR FRANCIS CONROY
ACAD 313
BURLINGTON COUNTY COLLEGE
601 PEMBERTON BROWNS MILLS RD
PEMBERTON, NJ 08068

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

Appendix 5

Copy of Forum Advertising Poster



**Re-connecting Our Lives
to the Land:**
A Mid-Winter Community Forum

Focus on Farmers, Educators & Environmentalists

Saturday, January 8, 2005

Snow Date: Saturday, January 15

9:30am – 2:30pm

BCC Pemberton Campus on County Route 530

Parker Center Cafeteria

Panels • Workshops • Food from Local Farms

(All Disciplines, from Environmental Science to Literature)

Keynote speaker: Dr. Jerry Glover – Farmer, Agro-Ecologist and Philosopher

The Land Institute, Salina, Kansas

Followed by a Nature Walk at Whitesbog (Tundra Swans Possible)

RSVP (to reserve lunch) to Dr. Francis Conroy, ACAD 313, Burlington County College, 601 Pemberton-Browns Mills Road, Pemberton NJ 08068 • Telephone: 609.894.9311 (ext 1620). Email: fconroy@bcc.edu

Planning Committee: Stephen Lee, Lee Bros. Farm; Patrick Slavin, BCC Biology Department; Anne Tokazewski, BCC Biology Department; Maria Peter, BCC-PINES; Bonnie Hart, Z889 WBZC-FM Program Director/Operations Manager

Appendix 6

Theme-setting speech given at the January 8, 2005 community forum, "Re-connecting our lives to the land."

Setting the Theme: Re-Connecting our Lives to the Land

AHC: "For generations, during New Jersey's long hot-and-humid summer months, residents of Burlington County have emptied out onto Long Beach Island, a thin stretch of salt, sand and shrubs where the Pine Barrens meets the Atlantic Ocean. Here on this barrier island, small Victorian villages and fishing piers have long enjoyed lazy summers precariously enduring coastal weather and ocean tides. But now, in the last few years, a new breed of visitor who has little respect for or knowledge of the traditions and quiet of the island has begun to enter. "These aren't beach people," an older LBI homeowner and landlord laments, pointing out the monstrous houses that have consumed the acres of scrub pines and sand dunes which once surrounded his century-old Marine Avenue rooming house.

The houses he points to are representative of a different and destructive mentality that has also swept Burlington County itself and neighboring inland counties in recent decades. This mentality forgets local tradition, ecology, economy and community and replaces it with the gigantism, materialism, and monotony of modern corporate-led consumerism. It engenders a battle of multi-national entity versus local shopkeeper, and encourages a landscape of mass produced building styles and fertilized lawns instead of vernacular architecture and native ground cover. This mentality encourages patterns of detachment, alienation and sadness, yet it continues to spread, unrelentingly, through the land. The shore, being a favored place, more readily attracts defenders of the landscape and seascape, or at least people who mourn their destruction. But few protests or tears hold back the din of motors or the dimming of the stars over the rest of the region."

JHC: What Allison has just read to you are the first two paragraphs, which open our forthcoming book, "South Jersey under the Stars." Our inspiration for this kind of work about this region came more than a decade ago as we, then young students at Holy Cross High School, began to question the patterns of development and the changes to the Burlington County landscape that we saw around us. But our concern for the area has always gone farther than simple aesthetic matters of landscape change. Like many others in the area we have come to associate certain kinds of landscape change -- for example the change from remnant woodland to strip mall or the change from family farmland to luxury townhouse development -- with a certain alienation from the very things that make South Jersey a unique and meaningful place --

things like local land and ecology, local businesses and community. All of these things seem forgotten in the kind of landscape that Wal-Mart created as it bulldozed dozens of acres of woodland in Cinnaminson in 2002 to make way for yet another Route 130 Strip Mall.

But, of course, as soon as we began to analyze these trends that we saw as alienating and destructive we realized that their causes and effects are very complex. Issues of regional and global economics, politics, culture, history, ecology, even spirituality, mingle with the issue of landscape change in our area of South Jersey. In short, we found that the reasons for our alienation and destruction were deeply embedded in the organizing structures of our life-processes. To reconnect to the land, then, seems to require not only a radical *deconstruction* of current worldviews, but also a subsequent *reconstruction* of the structures and processes that orient these life-ways. That is, we must rebuild our communities - **familial, educational, cultural, and spiritual** - so that they center on our most fundamental relationship - our relationship with the land.

We start with a focus on agriculture because food production is a necessity that no one can ignore. Agriculture is what ties all of us as humans to the earth, the land, and also consequently, to each other. It does so physically by giving us bodily sustenance, and also culturally, by coloring our nourishment with tastes, traditions, and timely celebrations. Yet so much within our society today disallows a connection to food production. Many of us are, in one way or another, alienated from our chief sources of physical sustenance. We rarely relate the sustenance and well being of our physical bodies to the sustenance and well being of the landscapes around us. And yet, we are connected - rooted - in a deep and inseparable way to the ground beneath our feet. We are, in essence, **the land, walking**.

As residents of New Jersey, our inability to construct our identities from the soil that sustains us means also that we are detached from the history of our place. We are alienated from the stories that defined New Jersey as the Garden State; looking around us, we cannot help but think this title is ironic. A common bumper sticker in my current home place of Burlington, Vermont warns Vermonters - Don't Jersey Vermont! What does this warning mean? Don't build more developments and strip malls, don't fill our landscapes with cars and parking lots. But, coming from another distinctly rural state, the warning goes much deeper than this. It warns Vermonters to recognize *their own agricultural reality* - to understand agriculture in Vermont not just as a token tourist trapping, but as a necessity to bodily and cultural sustenance. It asks Vermonters to construct their identities from the soil.

AHC: Kentucky farmer, author, and poet Wendell Berry tells us "A human community must collect leaves and stories, and turn them to account. It must build soil, and build that memory of itself — in lore and story and song — that will be its culture....These two kinds of accumulation, of local soil and local culture, are intimately related. . . . A human community, then, if it is to last long, must exert a sort of centripetal force, holding local soil and local memory in place. " (Berry 1990, 154-155). "[Unfortunately], the loss of local knowledge and local memory — that is, of local culture — has been ignored, or written off as 'one of the cheaper "prices of progress,"' or made the business of folklorists....And place, lacking an authentic local culture, is open to exploitation, and ultimately to destruction. . ." (Berry 1990, 157 and 166).

We form our identities from the places we live - and the experiences we have in these places - and yet few of us connect our **selves** to the agricultural realities that give us life. A farmer's diner in Barre, Vermont displays prominently on its menus a quotation from Wendell Berry that tell us "eating is an agricultural act." "Eating," says Berry, "ends the annual drama of the food economy that begins with planting and birth. Most eaters, however, are no longer aware that this is true. They think of food as an agricultural product, perhaps, but they do not think of themselves as participants in agriculture."

Wendell Berry laments that people who feel a prompting toward land stewardship find that "in this economy they can have no stewardly practice. . . . To be a consumer in the total global economy, one must agree to be totally ignorant, totally passive, and totally dependent on distant supplies and suppliers" (Berry 2001). But, as Berry tells us, "eating with the fullest pleasure - pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance - is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend." (Berry 1990, "The Pleasures of Eating").

The idea of reconnecting our lives to the land is not about some lifestyle choice that we can opt to partake in or that we can decide to ignore. It is not about creating a simple interest group or getting more people on the environmentalist bandwagon, no matter how important we think that may be. This forum is about a new type of cultural understanding -- a transformation of local habits of thinking and living, which reflect a communal understanding that we, as humans dwelling here, are integrally part of this place. Sometimes when I am explaining this idea of cultural change to people, I liken it to a trend I have noticed at the University of Hawaii. 20 years ago at the University there was no widespread attention paid to the native Hawaiian traditions that grew over centuries out of the island landscape-ecology. But slowly, over the past

two decades, people at the University began to see this inattentiveness as a great failure of the institution. Programs and initiatives were begun in an attempt to remedy this oversight such that today one can legitimately say that attentiveness to the native Hawaiian connection to the islands, *the land*, is a prime concern at the University. I mean this in two different senses. Not only is there a Hawaiian studies department and other programmed groups and events to address the concern rather specifically, but more importantly, there is a certain attentiveness to the islands as a place of special human ecology that has swept into every crevice of thought and action at the university. Now any decision made at the university is considered dated or dysfunctional if it ignores nativeness or connection to place.

I don't bring up this example specifically to say that we need to pay more attention to *indigenous* traditions, although that may be helpful in re-connecting to the land. I use the example to make a simple point that small-scale cultural change is actually quite realistic. We can, in our own communities right here in South Jersey encourage cultural connectedness or nativeness to place. Right on this very land we can encourage together the accumulation of local things of value -- local businesses and local buildings, local memories and local soil. As we hold onto these things we talk about them, use them, share them, and therefore begin to figure out together why it is that they hold meaning in our lives. We do this today as an important group -- as so-called concerned citizens -- but, our actions run the risk of irrelevance if we do not also push to include those who may not initially seem interested. Today we are aware of the need to cultivate concern in *everyone*.

JHC: We defend this concern -- this attentiveness to land, ecology, and place -- through cultural mechanisms. This may include making use of existing local cultural institutions like churches, grade schools, and community colleges. In fact, the community college could be the crucial local institution in this regard. The proposal to communally re-connect our lives to the land here in South Jersey gives new potential to BCC as a cultural leader in the area; it offers new meaning to what community college may signify. The community college can actually become a college oriented toward local community, and therefore inherently towards local land and place.

But, this brings me to one final point that we wanted to make here today. If our community college leads us to a greater orientation with land and place, this does not mean that we are to forget about lessons and experiences that are non-local or that come from other places. Orientation and attentiveness to local land and place does not imply indifference to things happening outside of our local realm. On the contrary, attentiveness to land here demands

concern for matters of ecology, agriculture, and community beyond South Jersey. To give one of many recent examples, as attentive local citizens we might find ourselves concerned with the fact that today in Iraq, under current US law, it is illegal for Iraqi farmers to save their seeds. They must return annually to the 'free-market' to buy that which will give them bodily sustenance (Skrypiczajko 2004). To say nothing about cultural freedom - liberty and the pursuit of happiness - requiring farmers to buy their life from the global marketplace hardly seems like democracy. In fact, it seems as though this new law is sure to set in motion certain inequitable mechanisms of the agricultural economy -- giving more power to the large corporate agribusinesses of the world while usurping local knowledge of the land (in this case the cultural practice of saving seed) from the family farmer. While this is taking place thousands of miles away in Iraq, it is important to understand such matters and come to terms with why it is that this kind of trend is troubling. We see reflected in this new seed law the beginnings of the same sort of distancing from the land that we are affected by here. As attentive citizens we begin to become aware of these trends and realize that a local orientation - a concern over our human ecology here - does not equate to a disinterest in distant places and peoples. Indeed, we grow to be aware of our place in South Jersey - inside our homes, within our region, on our earth, and under the stars.

Notes:

- Berry, Wendell. 2001. "Global Problems, Local Solutions: If governments fail to protect their citizens, then those citizens must protect themselves by developing local economies." in Resurgence, issue 206, May/June 2001. Available at <http://resurgence.gn.apc.org/issues/berry206.htm>
- Berry, Wendell. "The Work of Local Culture." *What Are People For?* San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990: 153-169.
- Skrypiczajko, Marya. 2004. "Agricultural dictatorship in Iraq" in B.C. The Organic Way: Where to Find Organic Food in British Columbia. December 2004. Available online at http://www.commonground.ca/iss/0412161/cg161_marya.shtml

Appendix 7

a. Copy of Program of Events from the January 8, 2005 community forum, "Reconnecting our lives to the land."

Re-Connecting Our Lives to the Land Program of Events

Burlington County College
Saturday, January 8, 2005

9:45 Welcoming -

Dr. Francis Conroy, forum coordinator and Professor of Philosophy
Dr. Timothy Patchke, Vice President of the College
Prof. Diane Veneziale, President of the Faculty Senate
Dean Delfico, Senator, Student Government Association

10:00 Remarks on the Theme -

Allison and Jessica Hayes-Conroy, authors of *South Jersey under the Stars: Essays on Culture, Agriculture, and Place*

10:20 Panel Discussion -

Sherry Dudas, Honey Brook Organic Farm, Hopewell Twp, Mercer Co.
Raymond Samulis, County Agricultural Agent, RCE of Burlington County
Mark Zamkotowicz, Physical Science Lecturer, Burlington County College
Earl Yarrington, English Lecturer, Burlington County College
Jane Nogaki, Pesticide Program Coordinator, NJ Env. Federation

11:00 Breakout Groups -

Themes and Locations

4. Seasonal Awareness - Gallery (led by A. Hayes-Conroy and Maria Peter)
5. Farming in the Suburbs - Private Dining Room (led by Sherry Dudas)
6. Agriculture across the Curriculum - Cranberry Room (led by Earl Yarrington and Mark Zamkotowicz)
7. Eating as an Agricultural Act - Dining Center (led by J. Hayes-Conroy)
8. Food Security - Dining Center (led by Jerry Glover and Ray Samulis)

12:00 Brief Group Reports

12:30 Lunch (see origins of food on back)

1:20 Keynote Address - Dr. Jerry Glover, Research Scientist and Natural Systems

Agroecologist from The Land Institute in Salina, (Ph.D. in Soil Science, Washington State University, 2001)

2:20 Closing and Optional trip to Whitesbog

b. Copy of side two of the forum “Program of Events,” which listed the origins of the food for the day’s shared meal.

Origins of Food

We are grateful that our traditional turkey dinner features many donated, locally grown vegetables, fruits, and spices.

Main Dishes

- Turkey: unknown source through conventional supplier
- 6. Stuffing: from conventional sources with cranberries from *Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc. Chatsworth, Burlington Co. and Lee Bros. Inc.*.
- Potatoes: from *P.D. Prickett Inc., Lumberton, Burlington Co.*
- 7. Cranberry Sauce: from *Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc. Chatsworth, Burlington Co. and Lee Bros. Inc.*

Vegetables

- Collard Greens: from *Budd's K-n-P Farms, Pemberton Township, Burlington Co.*
- Turnips: from *Budd's K-n-P Farms, Pemberton, Burlington Co.*
- Kale: green curly-leaf kale and Red Russian kale, from the *Honey Brook Organic Farm, Hopewell Township, Mercer Co.*; green kale from *Budd's K-n-P Farms, Pemberton,, Burlington Co.*
- Beets: heirloom bull's blood beets and red ace beets from the *Honey Brook Organic Farm, Hopewell Township, Mercer Co.*; red beets from *Budd's K-n-P Farms, Pemberton, Burlington Co.*
- Acorn Squash: from the *Honey Brook Organic Farm, Hopewell Township, Mercer Co.*

Spices

- Garlic: hard-neck German white garlic from the *Honey Brook Organic Farm, Hopewell Township, Mercer Co.*
- Thyme: the *Honey Brook Organic Farm, Hopewell Township, Mercer Co.*

Desserts

- Blueberry Pies: from *Atlantic Blueberry Co., Hammonton, Atlantic Co.*
- Blueberries: from *Atlantic Blueberry Co., Hammonton, Atlantic Co.*

Drinks

- 8. coffee and hot tea: from conventional sources
- 9. blueberry tea: from *Atlantic Blueberry Co., Hammonton, Atlantic Co.*
- 10. juices: from *Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc. Chatsworth, Burlington Co.*
- wine: from *Tomasello Wineries, Shamong, Burlington Co.*

Appendix 8

Projects for local institutions of (formal) education already emerging from the proceedings at the January 8, 2005 community forum.

- a. Moorestown Friends School, Burlington County, NJ (Larry Van Meter, Head of School)

The school already offers a Regional Studies course as a senior elective at the high school. The course is based loosely on the ideas purported by David Orr at Oberlin College. The course makes heavy use of McPhee's *The Pine Barrens* and various newspaper articles, but the instructor claims that appropriate material is hard to find and has suggested that *South Jersey under the Stars* (Associated University Presses 2005) could help fill some gaps. The school wants to stay in touch with forum organizers and participants to begin to find ways of using the course to further develop some of the ideas presented at the community forum.

- b. Burlington County College, Burlington County, NJ (Dr. Robert Messina, President of College)

Since the January 8 forum Burlington County College has begun to deal more directly with the issue of its own institutional attentiveness to the land. One simple but significant suggestion coming out of the forum event was the idea that the gathered participants find a continued means of organization. "We need a phone number, or a room, or an email address to come out of today's work," said one member of the organizing committee as he addressed the gathered group of over a hundred South Jersey residents. Burlington County College has answered this request by (as a start) creating an email address through which the discussions that were begun at the forum can continue. The address decided on was: civicagriculture@bcc.edu.

The forum also inspired the college administration to look harder into the idea of offering some sort of land-based, horticultural or agriculturally-based degree program. As part of this, the college is considering the possibility of taking over the 60 acre "Winner's Farm," an old family farm that has recently been sold to the county. The farm is located between the Mount Laurel campus of BCC and a massive new shopping development, just off of Route 38. The proximity to the Mount Laurel campus makes it a potentially strategic location for the county college, both economically and logistically.

Appendix 9

Utilized means of advertising for the January 8, 2005 community forum

- a. The **Forum Brochure** was sent to a NJ Farm Bureau list of county agriculturists, and to all BCC full-time and adjunct faculty. It was also given out at the Burl. Co. Agricultural Extension Office, the Pinelands Commission Office, the Pinelands Preservation Alliance Office, the NJ FB Women's Committee, and Whitesbog Preservation Trust, and passed out by hand to key players in the regional agricultural network including the Farm Fair Organizing Committee, members of local farmers markets, and well-known regional sustainability advocates.
- b. The **Forum Advertising Poster** was hung on all BCC campuses and sent to all area public middle schools and high schools to be displayed. Smaller versions of the poster also ran in *The County Bell*, a bi-monthly public newsletter, and the BCC non-credit brochure sent to every household in Burlington County. The poster also ran in the *Quaker Peace Piece*, a newsletter of the Religious Society of Friends.
- c. Table displays announcing the idea of the forum and the research early on were set up at the 2004 Whitesbog Blueberry Festival and the 2004 Earth Fair, set up at historic Smithville Mansion.

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Cited Interviews:

- Assistant Professor of Geology. Mount Laurel, NJ. July 9, 2004.
- Burlington County Agricultural Agent. Mount Holly, NJ. June 1, 2004.
- Coordinator, Burlington County Farm Fair. Lumberton, NJ. August 6, 2004.
- County Clerk, Burlington County. Mount Holly, NJ. May 28, 2004.
- Cranberry Farmer, retired Burlington County College Board Member, Pemberton, NJ. August 10, 2004
- Director of Burlington County College Radio. Pemberton, NJ. July 9, 2004
- Director of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, Burlington County. Smithville Mansion, NJ, August 3, 2004
- Director of Economic Development and Regional Planning, Burlington County. Mount Holly, NJ. May 28, 2004
- Director of Educational Outreach, Pinelands Commission. New Lisbon, NJ. August 3, 2004
- Director of Libraries, BCC. Pemberton, NJ. June 25, 2004
- Director of Outreach, Pinelands Preservation Alliance. Southampton, NJ. August 6, 2004
- Director of Programming, Whitesbog Preservation Trust. Whitesbog, NJ. August 10, 2004
- Food Sciences Academic Program Director. Mount Laurel, NJ. June 29, 2004.
- President, Pinelands Preservation Alliance. Southampton, NJ. August 6, 2004
- Professor of Biology. Mount Laurel, NJ. June 8, 2004.
- Professor of Economics. Mount Laurel, NJ. June 8, 2004
- Professor of English. Mount Laurel, NJ. May, 26, 2004.
- Professor of Environmental Science. Pemberton, NJ. August 3, 2004.
- Professor of Fine Arts. Tabernacle, NJ, July 11, 2004.
- Professor of Philosophy. Riverton, NJ. July 18, 2004.
- Professor of Sociology. Mount Laurel, NJ. June 9, 2004.
- Scientist, Pinelands Commission. Tabernacle, NJ, July 11, 2004

Image sources:

- www.co.burlington.nj.us/departments/resource
- freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/.../nj_map3.jpg