SITUATING SELVES
The Communication of Social Identities
in American Scenes

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CHAPTER 9

Decisions and Conflicting Selves: Dramatic Depictions of a Natural Environment

Mountains are symbols, like pyramids, of man's attempt to know God. Mountains are symbolic meeting places between the mundane and the spiritual world.

—Alan Hovhaness

Decision-making processes are sometimes conceived as individual activities. One popular version of the process goes like this: One reflects upon a current problem, and explores the various options one has available for solving that problem. One weighs the advantages and disadvantages of the alternative options, then selects the most desirable from among them. This process results in a decision. Envisioning the process in this rather cognitive way is perhaps to make this process a property of one's unitary self, a way of presenting and evaluating self's predispositions, a kind of internal dialogue radiating from what Harré (1991a) calls the "self-1." As Harré discusses, though, the resources that one uses in order to engage in this process can be thought of as fundamentally discursive. And further, what is intelligible—what is commonly sensible as a problem and what is coherent as solutions to it—can be thought of as largely cultural. If this is the case, then, responses to the questions "What is a 'social identity' or 'self'?" and "What, if anything, can (or should) one 'say' as such?" derive from the available discourses in one's cultural communities.

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The questions posed here are efforts to suggest that what a person (self or social identity) is, that a person can and should "make decisions," that how the person conceives of actions—all such "things" or processes can be understood as deriving from the particular culturescape of particular communities. That one has a communal heritage, or contests one, or creates with some variety of it, and that it is constituted discursively—this is essential and presumed for the main processes of concern to us in this and the following chapter.

Moving the site of one's thinking about agents-in-scenes from the inside of the person outward suggests that one explore the social and cultural dimensions of this discursive process. With this view, the decisions of agents entail the personal, yet also move beyond the personal to larger interactional matters. This again emphasizes the relocation of thought (and models of identity) into discursive patterns, and moves these from an internal speech—which one also plays—to a communally based, sociopolitical conversation. Processes of decision making, and social identification, writ this way, tie into a complex matrix of social interaction, which is itself a part of cultural conversations.

In the particular case of concern to us here, what is suggested is a complex movement, development, and counterplaying between decisions and social identities, as each bids for social and personal standing within this community's system of action. As a large communal process, the communication involves personal and political interests, institutionalized resources, sacred ancestors, and government intervention, all of which leads eventually to the construction not only of a human sociopolitical scene, but moreover to newer ways of being and living in a natural environment. My hope here is to show the promise of a cultural pragmatic approach to decision making and social identities that can span this broad range of personal and social territory.

DECISION MAKING AS SOCIAL DRAMA

I use the concept of social drama to help organize the variety of discursive and cultural formations activated in the complex decision-making process explored below. The concept derives from Victor Turner (1974, 1980) and largely encompasses Goffman's (1967) idea of ritual disequilibrium. As a whole, it suggests that
some processes of decision making, and some conflicts among social identities, begin with some sense of rupture, or a breach, or a violation. This realization ignites, then, a large-scale communicative process in four recognizable phases: (1) The event or incident of a breach or a violation occurs. (2) This is followed by a discourse which publicizes the violation, thus ratifying it socially as a crisis, with various social identities and relations being forged in the process. (3) The crisis is responded to in some ways, with the responses involving various types of remedial discourses as efforts to redress the violating incident(s). (4) The redressive actions may suffice, resulting in some sort of social reintegration, or they may not, thus recycling through violations, creating further social division or schism. For each phase of the form, there is a distinctive rhetoric, style, and mode of discursive action, with the redressive phase being crucially important, for it is in this phase, through cultural communicative forms, that attempts are made to repair the violation and bring contesting factions and interests together. From the vantage point of decision processes, it is here that attempts are made at drawing the competing alternatives and options—that arise during the crisis phase—into a conjoint plan.

The following case of decision making revolves around a land-use controversy. The land-use debates of concern here followed one version of this social dramatic process. Through the use of particular discursive patterns within this larger communicative form, particular configurations of social identities, social actions, motives, and a natural environment were being played into a larger-scale cultural scene. In the process, particular models, or identities of the person, or “selves—2” (to use Harré’s [1991a] term), were constructed and subsequently associated with publicly contested actions and motives (see Mills, 1940). The drama thus demonstrates how communicative practices such as these carry great psychological consequences, for as the discourse gets produced, so too do social personae, competing motives, and conflicted relations. And further, in this case, the consequences flow in two prominent directions. In one way, the discourses carry inward, as the discursive process subjects persons to bodily anguish, dissonance, and considerable consternation. In another, the discourses are materialized outwardly, as they carry designs for living-with-the-environment, and with each other, through two contesting ways of inhabiting a natural landscape.
The dynamics in this process thus demonstrate a decision making drama, a movement among social selves, between an inner and outer world, from the personal outward and back again. Through this dynamic process, one can hear in participants' own words not only individuals speaking but social identities, not only internal thought but communal conversations, not only dyadic dialogue but socially dramatic action. The exploration of this discursive and dramatic dynamic contributes, I hope, to a thoughtful reflection on human and humane living, a sometimes delicate dance between the inner and the outer, a dialectic of discourses that creatively constructs the personal and cultural conditions of life. At its base, it suggests that the large-scale processes of deciding and identifying can be conceived as discursive, as a communal conversation that penetrates personal and cultural worlds with persons creating senses of themselves, their motives, and their relations by creatively playing the dramatic discourses of communal life.

METHOD

Intensive field work for this report spanned a nine-month period from March through November of 1990, with subsequent periods of data collection still ongoing. Primary data included eight intensive interviews, averaging about seventy-five minutes each, all of which were fully transcribed. Participant observations included attendance at several public meetings, several informal conversations, and various social gatherings. Also included, but less central to the present study, were seven and one-half hours of audio-recorded and fully transcribed public hearings about this land. Additional data were collected during a unique set of field observations made while “Scrambling” with two thousand others up the massif, Mt. Greylock, to which the disputed land is attached. Other data included newspaper accounts about Greylock, an archive collected by the Appalachian Mountain Club pertaining to Greylock, files and reports of the development group, a book about the mountain and its cultural history (Burns and Stevens, 1988), and two televised broadcasts about this land. Harder to specify as data, but equally important to the above, were the hours I spent wondering about the disputed “Greylock” land during all four seasons.

Data were analyzed largely within the social-dramatic form, and further refined by attending carefully to a particular commu-
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Verbal Depictions of the Land. Eventually, I discovered how listening to different versions of this particular form would help me “track” the particulars, in this case, of the decision-making process. This focus was chosen, then, because of the potent meanings this kind of depictive practice carried for this community (see Carbaugh, 1992). My eventual claim should, if effective, show how— in this case— decision making involves depictions of the land, and illustrate how each depiction consists in local terms, their meanings and uses. More generally, my claims should demonstrate how dramatic uses of these practices construct various social identities, social relations among these, and distinct sets of motives, as well as conflicting proposals for living with nature. The dramatic process of deciding, in this case, involved nothing less.

The Scene and Historical Roots of the Discourse: Greylock Glen, Mt. Greylock State Reservation, and Adams

Greylock Glen is a 1,040 acre parcel of land in northwestern Massachusetts. The land consists mainly of wooded mountainside, some rolling pasture land, a series of ponds, hiking trails, and dirt roads. The parcel is immediately to the east of Massachusetts’ flagship state park, the Mount Greylock State Reservation. The reservation was formed in 1898 with the state purchase of 400 acres on the summit of Mt. Greylock which, at 3,491 feet, is the highest mountain in the state of Massachusetts. The reservation has now grown to over 11,000 acres. On the other side of Greylock Glen, about one mile from its center, is the town of Adams, with a population of about 11,000. The geographic relationship of Greylock Glen to the Mount Greylock State Reservation and the town of Adams is shown in figure 9.1

Since the early 1940s, Adams and much of northwestern Massachusetts have experienced deep and relentless economic decline, including the closing of many manufacturing industries with an attendant loss of employment, population, and tax base. Because of these general economic woes, and because the Greylock natural area was and is such an attractive parcel of land, it was sought by many, becoming, it seems, a site of continual struggle. In the 1940s, clear-cutting was begun, yet protested, then halted. In the early
the Mount Greylock Tramway Authority was formed, with some state support, to plan a “highly commercial $5.5-million downhill-ski resort project, including four chair lifts, 11 miles of ski trails (some of them hundreds of feet wide), restaurants, cocktail lounges, a dance terrace, swimming pool, sauna, motels, fountains, riding stables, an amusement park, an international shopping center, and a 1,000 car parking lot. The centerpiece of the resort [was to be] the world’s largest aerial tramway, transporting passengers to a 100-foot tower on the summit of Mount Greylock” (Burns and Stevens, 1988, p. 77). After news of the full proposal got public, and this took from two to three years, a public reaction was spearheaded by the Mount Greylock Protective Association. This group was able to raise $18,250 from 1,300 members to delay, and finally defeat, the proposal. In the early 1970s, when a private developer began to piece together several private properties totaling 1,040 acres, the area became known as Greylock Glen. This development proposal—more modest than the earlier Tramway idea—involves a condominium complex, convention center, golf course, and ski area. Despite some groundbreaking and foundation pouring, financial backing for this resort idea began to fall through. In 1980, as a last-ditch effort to save the project, the developer proposed bringing Las Vegas-style casino gambling to the area, but the state legislature refused to consider the bill, and then-Governor Dukakis opposed the measure.

An Economic Breach:
Unemployment, Business Failures

In the early 1980s, when much of Massachusetts was experiencing, as Governor Dukakis put it later, “a miracle” of economic growth, the northwestern corner of the state was not. Companies were leaving the area and unemployment had reached double-digit figures. The northern Berkshire area earlier, during the Reagan era, had seen no money “trickle” its way, nor during the Dukakis “miracle” had it been “saved.”

An Attempted Redressive Act:
Massachusetts State Legislation

Many social goals . . . require partnership between public and private groups. Though government should not seek to replace local communities, it may need to empower them by strategies of support,
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including revenue-sharing and technical assistance. There is a great need for study and experimentation with creative use of the structures of civil society, and public-private cooperation.
—The Responsive Communitarian Platform, p. 10

Because of the economic doldrums in the Greylock region, the history of development failures, and the conflict of interests, the state in 1984 decided to intervene and solicit a private developer who would appease the various interests. The general idea was to propose for this land, with the input of state officials, environmental leaders, area residents, and business leaders, “a public-private partnership.” The main objective was to provide—as it is worded in the developer’s Final Environmental Impact Report—“a recreational facility of regional economic impact.” Specific goals of the Massachusetts’ Commonwealth in the legislation were:

1. To ensure continued protection of Mt. Greylock State Reservation and the unique scenic, natural, and historic resources that it encompasses; and

2. To facilitate the diversification of the Northern Berkshire economy through the development of a four-season destination resort/recreation area at Greylock Glen.

By 1985, the “Massachusetts miracle” still had yet to reach the Greylock environs, but with this legislation passed, help seemed on its way.

Back to the Future:
Potential Redress Leads to . . .

As time passed, the immediate euphoria among many Adams’ residents upon passage of the legislative act could not help but wane. As the specifics of the development “partnership” became known, the bubble of excitement began to burst, as some environmental horns sounded, and the state economy began to crumble. By 1988 and 1989, two environmental groups—Massachusetts Audobon and the Mount Greylock Protective Association—had gone public as opposing the project. The main items of dispute included the number of dwellings to be placed on the land (from 1275 “condos” to 850 “mountain homes”), the size of a pond/lake to be built (from 35 to 25 acres), money issues (how much money should a state, now experiencing economic difficulties, put into a
partially private development?), to questions about the proposed “public-private” ownership of the land itself (why is this a public-private partnership, when this land could be annexed by the state to the public reservation?). In mid-October 1990, the place hit the headlines again. This time, however, for undisclosed reasons, the Massachusetts’ inspector general was “investigating the proposed construction of a state-backed $220 million vacation home resort on Mount Greylock.” The investigation occurred amidst much political activity: Then-Democratic-Governor Dukakis, the original proponent of the plan, was about to leave office, with Democrats and Republicans worrying the project would, respectively, die out, or be secretly finalized. So, as one group attempted quickly to ratify a land-disposition agreement on what parts of the land would be state-owned and how profits would be divided between the state and private developer, so development could begin, the other filed a bill prohibiting development on the land. Finally, the land disposition hearings were held, but not until Republican Governor Weld entered office. After the above investigation, and hearings, Governor Weld’s early (1991) administration decided to halt the agreement between the state and the developer, and to reassess the fate of Greylock Glen.

Further Violations and Crises

At this point in the discussion, in the wake of the legislative act, one could hear various alleged violations. One vilified the attempts to develop the land, casting “development” as a violation by the government of the “commonwealth’s” land and landscape. These allegations were stated through a rhetoric of environmental destruction that motivated certain parties, mainly self-avowed environmentalists and some who live adjacent to the land, to publicize this fact and form alliances with like-minded others. The other alleged violation involved the government’s withdrawal of the state plan, which precipitated discourse from many in the town of Adams, especially those in the Chamber of Commerce, who felt that “the rug was pulled from under us.” On this front, one heard a rhetoric of abandonment. Crises ensued as the earlier attempt at redressing the region’s economic situation through the state’s legislative act was now being undercut by the economic decline in the state, which resulted in further complications of economic, environmental, political, and personal sorts.
Let us enter this conflicted conversation a little closer to the ground, as people in this community discuss the land-scene, and with it their current lives and livelihood. As a result of listening more closely, we will begin to hear in their discourse their concerns and their motives for decisions they are making, and eventually to identify the relations this discourse creates among the various people involved, and between them and their natural environment.

CRISIS AND THE CONFLICTING FACTIONS: TWO DEPICTIONS OF A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Conflict seems to bring fundamental aspects of society, normally overlayed by the customs and habits of daily intercourse, into frightening prominence. People have to take sides in terms of deeply entrenched moral imperatives and constraints. (Turner, 1974, p. 35)

Simple turns of phrase can get read into ongoing cultural discourses in ways that are puzzling to outsiders. I experienced as much early on when I would ask townsfolk about "Greylock" (thinking of the 1000 acres of land) and receive a long narrative about "Adams" (the town). A way out of my confusion arose as I began to understand that people in this region of Western Massachusetts could refer, in short, to this land as either "the mountain" or "the project," with these phrases implicating larger motivational systems through a communal sense. By using these terms, even if unwittingly, a social position is forged by them with regard to decisions about this land. Caught in this discursive process, persons and competing factions are being constituted, with relations among them and their world assuming a dramatic quality. In other words, these two main discursive references to the land are coding this drama—in Turner's terms—into a "conflict" between "deeply entrenched moral imperatives and constraints." In the process, each is creating a rupture between themselves and those who "see" (or speak?) the scene differently. Each position, from the vantage point of the other, carries with it an associated sense of violation, a continuing of the crisis, and different ideas about what is proper as corrective actions. Consequently, each way of speaking about the land has associated with it conflicting beliefs about who people are, their actions, and their ways of living with nature.
I will call the one discourse a "coding of economic needs," and the other a "coding of natural ecology"—following the issues being foregrounded with each. As each solidifies a particular rhetoric, style, and mode of discursive action, it further accentuates its own senses of violation and crisis. As a result of each being played against the other, a conjoint decision, an integrative redressive action, is made more distant and difficult—if not downright impossible—to attain.

"Up on the project": Coding Local Economic Needs

On a hot summer afternoon, in an office suite in downtown Adams, I sat down with "the developer" (his term for himself) to discuss "Greylock." Surrounding us were detailed and attractive diagrams which showed the vision of what "the Greylock project" would be. After showing aerial photographs of the land, and how certain features of the project (e.g., cluster housing, golf course, ponds, ski trails, etc.) would be situated upon it, he described several past projects in Adams which were "stalled"—housing projects, real estate businesses, a color photograph laboratory, a furniture store, several attempts with restaurants—and contrasted these with successful ventures further away, both to the north (in Vermont) and south (in "Southern Berkshire"). Against this backdrop, he described "Greylock" as "a catalyst" for Adams, an energy boost for the town (with "busloads of people going to Boston to lobby" for it). He described the considerable efforts taken by the town to prepare itself for "the project" (rewriting zoning ordinances, getting public aid grants to redo Main Street, hiring a town planner). All of this, according to him, showed how eager the Adams' people were to "try to get the economy back on track." Because the development would bring others to the Adams area, rather than to the outlying areas which are relatively well-to-do, he reasoned, the project would "provide demand for the businesses that are here, to prosper and grow." He went on:

This project is perceived as more a catalyst than anything else. . . . The business community is not so much concerned about how many and exactly what kind of jobs we can create up on the project, even though that is clearly an important issue, but they are mostly concerned with whether this project is going to bring X numbers of warm bodies here with money to spend,
and we need that. Our economy desperately needs that. . . . We have a thousand acres of land up there that until this project came along had always been a private ownership and was never public and was never part of the Greylock Reservation, so it's been privately owned. One of the benefits of this project is that it has forced a master plan upon the land, a four-season recreation community on a large piece of continuous acreage in a way that's responsive to the land and to the desires of those who use adjacent lands. . . . It's a magnificent piece of property. It can be a hugely successful project if done properly.

Others depicted this piece of Greylock land similarly. Each used a discourse—of coselected symbols and meanings—which depicted the land as an "up there," thus suggesting symbolically to listeners that they view—or portray, or sense, or feel—the land from down below, as a member of the developmentally minded segment of Adams. By using this discourse, the developer has also created a symbolic sense of this "Greylock" land as a "project" and "catalyzt" that could transform Adams' current dismal conditions into a better place. He also has created a sense of himself, his motives, and relations to others with his words. There is much getting said here. Let us look in a bit more detail at some of the prominent meanings in this depictive form.

Notice again how the developer described the land, as above: "We have a thousand acres of land up there that was never public and was never part of the Greylock Reservation, so it's been privately owned. Anything could happen up there." The use of phrases like "up there" in the developer's speech carry great symbolic weight in this cultural scene. Uses of the preposition, "up," plus an indexical locator, like "there," "on the project," "on the Glen," "on the site," or "on the property," create phrases which refer to the land as an "up there," "up on the Glen," or "up on the project." This phrasing portrays "Greylock" as a place above, and suggests symbolically that participants view the land from "down below" in Adams, looking "up."

This symbolic location of one down below looking up at the land, it is important to make clear, is not a simple verbal artifact of a speaker's physical situation when speaking, such as down below the land. While such usage is prominent down below in Adams, I also heard it up higher when I was above the disputed land, on top of the mountain; that is, this usage appeared also above the land, where it makes no literal sense. Similarly, I heard
it away from the base of the mountain (in other nearby towns). This depictive usage does invoke a spatial dimension, but it is more than a simple literal reference to a physical place.

This “locational” usage is a socially based moral claim as well. Depicting the land this way invites participants into a physical and moral space in which the land and its people should be conceived in a very particular way. Through this symbolic location, specific ways of thinking, acting, and feeling are evoked which are prominent down below in Adams, implicating that town’s particular historical, economic, and political concerns. By depicting the land from this symbolic vantage point, interlocutors are invited into that town’s physical and symbolic space. The land, then, rendered as an “up there” above Adams, is not simply a reference to an external reality, although it is that, but it is moreover a socially based moral move within a cultural game, a move which creatively evokes a complex of associations, a discursive invitation to see, hear, feel, and act upon “this land” in particular ways.

The complex of meanings specifically associated with this coding of space are geographic, economic, and political. Cultural geography is being implicated when the parcel of land is symbolized as “up there,” physically above the town center (e.g., “a thousand acres of land up there”). Solidifying this view is the hearable claim that “this land” is also, “officially,” a part of “the town.” As a prominent resident asserted: “It’s our land. We’ll win any lawsuit if it comes to that.” Speaking “the land” this way draws it into the town’s boundaries, thus drawing a verbal map of a cultural geography which includes Adams and this piece of land within a single geocultural-political space (see figure 9.1). As such, it becomes a site which is included in the town’s municipal boundary, is a part of that town’s history, and is the location of its most recent civic “project.”

Included within this geosymbolic space, the land becomes a distinct part of a town and its activities, thus positioning participants to see/hear this land from the standpoint of that particular town and its concerns. To interpret the full meaning, then, of Greylock within this system, we must have some sense of the concerns of this town, especially the very real economic and political conditions which town members see as their own, and which create further the larger symbolic scene within which this “land” plays its distinctive role.
The economic climate of Adams in 1990 was avowedly dismal. As several townfolk put it: "The business climate is really suffering"; "In this month of July in the year of 1990, yesterday it was announced four hundred jobs are leaving Adams"; "Last week they announced that we're beginning the reduction of 22 percent of the work force, 550 people leaving good paying employment." This theme of economic deprivation runs deeply into the recent past: "We lost 3,000 jobs in the last five years"; We never experienced any of (then-President Reagan's) "trickle down in the early 80's" nor of (then-Governor Dukakis') "miracle" of the mid-eighties. In fact, the only economic heyday for the region seems to have been short-lived and occurred around 1875 when the Hoosac Tunnel was blasted through the Hoosac mountains to provide for the cheap and efficient transportation of manufacturing goods to Albany and Boston.

It is rather ironic that what has been the main attraction of this area to so many (outsiders?)—the scenic geography—has also been a key source of its economic problems. Placed between mountain ranges in a valley, Adams is relatively inaccessible. The remoteness created by the geography has had, so town members say, its further economic and political consequences.

The town-land is also symbolized as economically bypassed. When the discourse encompasses the larger cultural map, as the developer mentioned above, Adams is contrasted with its surrounding areas. These adjacent regions provide symbolic counterspaces where things and people are deemed better. One such place is called "Southern Berkshire" (a distinction common throughout Massachusetts), which has its associations of wealth, stability, and upper class. "Southern Berkshire" is the location of Stockbridge (a popular tourist destination, former home to the artist Norman Rockwell, summer home to the Boston symphony, Tanglewood, and several summer theaters), and Sheffield (the place of second homes for many wealthy New York and Connecticut residents). The "Southern Berkshire" space thus connotes—from the vantage point of this economic coding—greater affluence, upward mobility, a different and higher class of people and activity. Similarly, this discourse identifies the region to the immediate north as "great ski country," which includes the major ski resorts of southern Vermont, Stratton Mountain, Bromley, Haystack, and Mount Snow among others. Associated with both of these adjacent
regions is the wealthy and upper status that Adams' people so desperately seek.

The full discourse of which this depictive code is a part thus positions the land as a place and the speaker as a vested person within a general geocultural scene. It invites one to locate within a historical and current site of economic deprivation (i.e., the town of Adams), and thus to promote its main symbol of economic opportunity (i.e., “the project up there”).

Promoting the land “up there” counters not just these economic deprivations, but also the image of the town as politically marginal. The larger cultural map introduced above, when extended another direction, to the east, amplifies this meaning, with the symbolic movement in this direction introducing not just economic but political deprivation. As an informant put it, importing a phrase from another region of the United States commonly portrayed as marginal and deprived: “The perception of Berkshire County, in particular Northern Berkshire in Eastern Massachusetts, is very bad. It's like the dreary Berkshire County backwater.” During a public hearing about “Greylock,” an older man from Adams’ described how “a Boston newspaper” referred to Adams’ as “the boondocks” and “a cultural nowhere,” and to its people as “millrats” and “Joe six-pack.” The Appalachia of Massachusetts.

A similar symbolic reference to Adams’ relative political impotence occurs as “environmental groups” are mentioned. Although somewhat implicit, when introduced within this coding strategy, the point is made: From the vantage point of this economic code, the people in the east—including some “environmental groups” like Massachusetts Audobon whose headquarters are close to Boston—are given much more public press and power than the Adams’ Chamber of Commerce, or the project developer. These “eastern others” are thus portrayed, in contrast to Adams, as “outsiders” and sources of political power, especially the state officials way over in the capital of Boston.

The frustration of being “marginalized” geographically, economically, and politically is shown in this comment, made by a successful native son of Adams: “Let [the head of Massachusetts' Audobon] sit in somebody's living room who just lost their job and explain to them why he would oppose something like this [the Greylock project]. . . . He wouldn't have the courage to go in and tell them.” His potent symbolic message contrasts Adams’ people, actions, and needs (i.e., as geographically peripheral, economically
deprived, and politically marginal) with potent distant forces from the east (i.e., as geographically central, economically endowed, and politically efficacious). Through their words, people speak and are heard not just as personally invested, but—as is typical during phases of crisis—as representatives of the town and its woes, as ones who are motivated to become champions of the town's "project."

The Redressive Act Associated with this Economic Coding. Because many members of Adams see themselves as deprived of essential political and economic resources (as contrasted with virtually everyone around them), and because they see Greylock as a part of their town and its most valuable resource (e.g., "the last developable land in the town"), they advocate the land "up there" as a "project," as a chance to transform their dismal present and past into a promising future, as a chance to make something more of their community and themselves. "The project," within this system, takes on what Kenneth Burke would call a God-term quality, a cure-all for past and present social ills. What specifically is it that town members envision with this "project"? When "the project" was mentioned, I would sometimes ask if it could be described to me. Most typically, it was described, as one person put it, by mentioning "some cross-country skiing, a golf course, and some housing." This quick coding of "the project" was elaborated by the developer on a "fact sheet." Quoting from that sheet: "recreation facilities include nordic ski and hiking trails (46 km), a norpine ski area (1 chair lift; 80 acres of trails), an 18-hole golf course, a 1,000 seat outdoor amphitheater, 10 tennis courts, 3 swimming ponds, 2 swimming pools; community facilities include a 150-200 room village inn, a retail commercial center, a fitness center, a golf pro shop and nordic center, a country club, 850 units of cluster housing, and a 150-200 room conference center/health fitness resort." The developer goes on to explain that all of the project is adjacent to, not on, the state reservation: "of the 1,040 acres of land, approximately 300 will be utilized for development of the village, country club, conference center and all housing. Approximately 740 acres are devoted to open space and public recreational uses." The developer predicts, by the year 2010, the "cumulative municipal benefit to Adams" will be 45 million dollars.

"The project" is thus seen from, and inextricably linked to, Adams. When mentioned, it signals what former President Bush
and some Adams’ residents described as “one giant ray of light” for the community. Within this cultural scene, it will help transform what those from the east portray as, and those from Adams sometimes agree is, the “dreary backwaters” of an economically deprived, politically usurped, and geographically bypassed region. Coded in this way, a parcel of land “up there” becomes a promising “project” and presents itself as one giant remedy to the town’s considerable economic and political ills.

“At the foot of Mt. Greylock”:
Coding Cultural Ecology

An alternate coding of this “same” land positions participants in a very different physical and symbolic place. One prominent environmentalist is the leader of a local land trust and conservation fund. When asked about “Greylock,” he began by saying:

Well, Greylock Glen... well Mt. Greylock, maybe I’ll start with the reservation. It is wonderful. It’s a wonderful reservation. It’s the oldest [state park], has great dignity, has great character, has great historic presence. And it has a warm and loving constituency who feel strongly that it should be preserved. Greylock Glen, that troublesome property to the east of the Greylock reservation has been subject to any number of ill-conceived proposals... by a succession of scoundrels [he excepts the above developer from this label]... It’s right beside Mt. Greylock. It’s an attractive piece of land.

Others depict the area similarly. From a naturalist on the state reservation:

I’m a naturalist and emotionally attached to the mountain, so seeing anything like this [the Glen project], you look down like now and it’s a pretty area. It’s open land and lakes... and just to think that it’s going to be developed into more houses... would make me feel sick to my stomach looking down on it.

The land is being symbolized here, literally, as part of the Mt. Greylock massif. Similarly:

Greylock is a unique, natural resource, the best one, and probably the most famous one in Massachusetts and we ought to keep it that way... I have visited all of the meadows and farms at the foot of Mt. Greylock... While it [Greylock Glen] is a beautiful spot for a few condominiums, that would virtually destroy
the scenic aspect of the lower portions of the Greylock landscape.

These depictions symbolically place participants in a very specific physical place ("up") on the state reservation, most likely from the summit viewing area, looking down. Note the first speaker above, who audibly fluctuated between the two available depictions, deliberately anchoring his position above (starting with "the mountain" and "reservation"), rather than below (on "the glen" or in "Adams"). Greylock, depicted this way, is viewed not from the town below but from a different geographic angle, from up above. Coding the land this way draws it into the borders of the state reservation, associating it with an alternate discourse of symbolic meanings, elaborating themes not explicitly of local political economics, but of Massachusetts' highest natural environment and its inspirational effects upon contemporary Americans and their ancestors.

This depiction of Greylock Glen from above looking down creatively evokes symbols of wildness, a refuge of nature. The depiction is sometimes even elaborated with descriptions of the natural environment: "It's scenic land... There are bears and bobcats and things coming around... and an occasional sighting of a mountain lion or cougar." From a biologist:

Massachusetts doesn't have much in the way of mountains, compared to other areas of the country, but this one mountain is pretty impressive. It's the one highest mountain. It's unique. It's a monadnock in the geologic sense. It's isolated and it's pretty spectacular... It harbors a lot of scarce or rare flora that we ought to be concerned about. One species I know of has only two individual plants growing on the mountain and both of them are very close to foot and vehicular traffic... I'm concerned about things like that. Lower down in the area of Greylock Glen, there's unique crayfish, the Appalachian crayfish.

Another described the Glen as "a marvelously quiet and tranquil area."

The symbolic sense of Greylock as a pristine natural environment is associated with another that is more historical, an American literary tradition, and as such, this land is even considered to be a generative force for some classic American literature and poetry, such as some of the famous writings of William Cullen Bryant, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Herman
Melville, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. I did not fully appreciate this symbolic link upon first hearing it. After climbing a rugged ridge to the summit of Greylock, I was more than a little puzzled to discover that regular gatherings were held at the rustic summit lodge for “tea, poetry, and literature.” I eventually was told by patient others about the great Americans who were associated with Greylock, who had walked and hiked there. Many claimed even today to sense their presence. In fact, appearing in the summit lodge during the summer of 1990—and periodically since—was a proud display of the great American figures who are linked to Greylock (see the summary in Burns and Stevens, 1988, 42–50, 93–100).

The early American poet, William Cullen Bryant wrote numerous poems about Greylock’s streams, peaks, and natural features. Nathaniel Hawthorne was the first to refer to the mountain in print as “Graylock.” He was reportedly fascinated by the local scenery, especially relations between mountains and clouds. He hiked often on the mountain and wrote of it as “a most romantic and picturesque country.” In his story “Ethan Brand,” his title character spends his last night on Mt. Greylock. In 1844, Henry David Thoreau climbed Mt. Greylock, spending the night on its summit with a board as a blanket, and wrote extensively of the experience in A week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. Thoreau’s mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, dubbed Mt. Greylock “a serious mountain.” Herman Melville finished writing Moby Dick in the nearby town of Pittsfield, and dedicated his novel Pierre “To Greylock’s Most Excellent Majesty.” Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote many poems that mentioned Greylock. Perhaps most salient for present purposes are the following lines penned by Holmes as a tribute to the Berkshire Mountains in the last year of his life (1894).

Oh how I should love to look on Pittsfield again! And yet I have always dreaded the rush of memories it would bring over me, and dread it still. But there lie buried many of my dearest and sweetest memories of my earlier middle age; and, if I cannot look on Greylock and Pontoosuc with these eyes which are fast growing dim, I can recall them with infinite affection and delight.

Upon being exposed to these well-known American writers, and their association with Greylock, I began feeling, seeing, and hearing this land anew, as a most majestic, historically evocative natu-
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cultural environment and culturescape. The literary history integrated into this depiction renders Greylock as a generative force in American literature and lives. Foregrounded in the depiction from "above" is not just a physical location, a mountain park and forest, but a whole multifaceted tree whose branches span widely over a vast natural refuge, and whose roots run deep into America's past.

So informed, one begins to see, hear, and feel this natural place through an alternate discursive coding, being placed differently (up above, in a heavenly? space) for viewing, highlighting natural features of its environment, and evoking its own natural and cultural past.

The above depiction of this land is activated with potent local phrases, such as "at the foot of Greylock." Speaking the landscape this way places interlocutors in a very precise physical place, up above on the mountain, and suggests looking down at a natural environment that is linked to this mountain. Verbally portrayed is a place that is (and should be) a part of the state's first park ("the foot of Greylock"). This communicative placing—of interlocutors in space—invokes two additional sets of cultural meanings, with one elaborating the uniqueness of this specific ecological system and the other identifying a specific literary tradition which is associated with it. So positioned, "Greylock Glen" assumes status as a part of Mt. Greylock, on or "at its foot." This verbal portrait conceives the land as a natural refuge that is public (in the broadest sense of a state and national property), which should stay that way, because its particular ecologic and literary meanings would benefit the larger common good, rather than enhance just one community's economic and political power. Those who portray the land this way thus display an identity (often heard as an "environmentalist"), through a motive of preservation, which contests those more developmentally minded.

Is it possible for these two depictive codes, the ecologic and the economic, these two ways of conceiving people, projects, and place, to work together? Can these contesting codes move from battle and competition to cooperation and collaboration?