CHAPTER 10

Dueling Identities:
In Search of Common Political Ground

There are two solutions being proposed through the two coding strategies described in chapter 8. The one is to preserve the pristine; the other is to promote the project. These are sometimes invoked discursively through a quick mention of “the mountain” or “the project,” suggesting that “the land” is (and should be) the one rather than the other. Here we will explore just how these proposed solutions to a community problem operate interactionally, one with the other, to create antagonistic identities and conflicted relationships between participants. Forging a decision—an efficaciously integrative action and identification—between these contesting codes seemed, for a long time (and maybe forever?), nearly impossible.

Three interactional messages are being foregrounded when these two depictions are brought together into one discursive occasion. One involves the symbolic presentation of social identities, or typical personae, which are affiliated with each depiction; a second, introduced above, involves the advocacy of a redressive action that is associated with each of these positions or personae; the third are the social relationships that are constructed between the two general personae, and their advocated actions. This complex of dynamics is perhaps most pronounced when participants praise one code, thereby asserting one identity, position, or action over the other. Similar to the vacillating form discussed in chapters 7 and 8, I call this dynamic “dueling identities,” or “dueling depictions” (see Carbaugh, 1992). Within one forceful version of this process, when one code is in use, the other looks—or is rather said to be—downright preposterous. I write “said to be” because it is also abundantly clear that whenever one of my friends, or informants, used one of the above codes, or a feature of it, they also demonstrated, generally, an awareness of, or familiarity with, the other. So, it is not so much that each depiction or persona is unin-
telligible to the other, but rather that they are treated as such, interactionally, in order to make the moral claim that the one is better than the other. In the discursive process, participants thus engage in deeply coded battles through the local communicative practices of this scene.

These dramatic messages are shown here in an excerpt from an interview with a naturalist, who lived in Pittsfield, and brought the codes together as follows:

When I've talked to the folks in Adams and I've talked to a lot of them about this project, it's a sense of "How dare you as an outsider tell me how to run my town. What I'm doing is in Adams, it's for the people in Adams and why should you who lives in Lennox, Pittsfield, or Williamstown be concerned with this?" It's a real sense of local rule and local entitlement that drives these arguments, and when I say "Wait a minute, I've got people from across the street who care about this reservation of Mt. Greylock," they get mad and say, "It's always the outsiders. It's the people from the east who are telling us what to do."

In this instance, the depictive codes are played one against the other in this way: "this project" is mentioned and associated with "the people in Adams" and matters of "local rule and local entitlement"; this cluster of symbols is contrasted with "the reservation" or "Mt. Greylock" and those "outsiders" who "care about" it. By invoking the symbolic meaning systems described in chapter 9, we can hear the "Adams' people" promoting the "project" to bolster their economic and political standing, while the "outsiders" champion "the mountain" and its cultural history as a natural preserve. This illustrates a way the codes are played against one another, with the proposed solutions of each being further separated and solidified in the process, just as the motives and identities of each party are also being separated and solidified.

From the standpoint of the economic code, as it is used here, local people have made up their own mind about the project and don't want anyone from the outside meddling in their own affairs. From the standpoint of the ecologic code, the locals are so insular and provincial that they can't even hear an alternate view even if just "from across the street." The identificational work getting done, by the naturalist here, maligns the local economic code. It is discursively cast as one promoted by a provincial, perhaps even selfish, persona who, by means of a symbolic contrast with the
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ecologic code, "cares less" about "the mountain." Associated with the ecologic code is a persona who may not live immediately in the town of Adams (the common sense suggests he's an "outsider"), but cares nonetheless deeply about its "mountain."

These dynamics sometimes become more intense, leading in some cases to name calling, with discursive attributions being made about others' personae. Those promoting the ecologic code were called, from the standpoint of the local economic code, "environmentalists," "outsiders," and "intellectually dishonest" (because they first seemed to support, then later antagonize, "the project"). Their actions were said to be "insulting" (because as outsiders they could not hear nor consider local issues) and condescending ("who are they to tell us what to do?"). As one put it: "Our view is, you don't live here, we live here. That property and that land is part of a functioning community and that community has, should ultimately have control over it. And I look distastefully at the folks who come in from almost everywhere and tell me what I should and shouldn't do with my property." The most intense hostility and anger was expressed by those promoting the local economic code against "outsiders" (see Lange, 1990, 1993).

By playing the depictions in reverse, valuing ecologies over economics, proponents of the natural code portrayed the others, especially the developers, as "scoundrels" (those from the earlier Tramway-gambling era), "land speculators," and "rapists of the land." Their activities, or desired activities, were said to involve "a commercial enterprise" which was "evil," a "real estate misadventure" which would "destroy the scenic aspect of lower Greylock" and "sacrifice bird and animal life."

Constructed through this dynamic of dueling depictions are two sets of personae, each maligning the other. Each is aligned with a primary motive and strategic action. When a "town member" says, "I'm for the project," she or he is heard to be motivated by local (primarily economic, but also political) needs and meets those needs through advocating "the Greylock Glen development." The "environmentalist," on the other hand, is explicated as one who is motivated by ecologic problems, and a literary aesthetic, and claims to act in order to preserve or conserve "the mountain" for the "common" good. During this drama, each such avowal can be used as a basis for attributing to, or implicating for the other a suspect persona, strategic action, and motives. From the economic code, the ecologists are implicated as "outsiders"
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who want town land as a site for their playground (their motive) and are condescending and meddling in local affairs which they don’t understand; from the ecologic code, the locals are profit-driven, provincial, and self-interested (their motive) and don’t understand the more general environmental consequences of their “project.” The social relationships thus created through these dueling depictions derive from these competing identities, while the competing proposals each is heard to have made is creating—through these dueling codes—an antagonistic, intractable, and strained social drama.

The above discursive formation has a firm grip on these participants. The discourse is robust. It is conducted so often as if there are two extreme, mutually exclusive, diametrically opposed personae and patterns for action. When keyed this way, the features of this “talk” presume, and recreate, the very dilemma being discussed. When discussing “the project,” it is assumed that development should proceed as planned; with regard to “the mountain,” the land should be annexed to the state reservation. Generally, in a nutshell, this land-use controversy is spoken as that cut-and-dry.

HINTS OF AN INTEGRATIVE REDRESS:
A COMMUNITY SEEKS COMMON GROUND

Rarely, in 1989–1991, sometimes in a back room, in quieter moments, with few people listening, one could hear in rather hushed tones—as some put it—some “middle ground.” These cautious proposals began to moderate the antagonisms by scaling down the degree of development, suggesting more “low-level development,” or “limited development.” In the other direction, the hard-line ecological code was being “scaled up” to include some very modest development. Mentioned here during these times were several rather undeveloped ideas, such as fewer housing units, or a small public campground on the northeast part of the Glen (the Thiel Farm area). This would have minimal impact on “the foot of Greylock,” but would provide modest economic benefits from “up on the project.” Still other proposals involved channeling economic development toward other parts of the Northern Berkshire area, thus abandoning the Greylock Project altogether. That these ideas were rarely mentioned, and if men-
tioned, were done so largely in private, demonstrates the dramatic
grip the economic and ecologic depictions held on this communal
conversation. At base, it shows the difficulty of depicting "this
land" in economic and ecologic terms. The community was hav-
ing great difficulty adopting both terms of the original legislation:
They wondered, how can we depict this land as a protected pre-
serve which diversifies the local economy?

With the January 1991 change in state government adminis-
trations—from the Dukakis Democratic to the Weld Republi-
can—came a period of reassessment. The government plans for
this land were being reevaluated. Creative ways of resolving, or
mediating between, the divisively different factions needed to be
found.

A key move in this reassessment was the eventual formation of
a widely representative "Advisory Committee" by the state of
Massachusetts' Department of Environmental Management
(DEM). This currently ongoing planning committee consists of
twenty members: six from state agencies, six from the town of
Adams, four from various environmental groups (i.e., Sierra Club,
Mt. Greylock Protective Association, Audobon Society, Appala-
chian Mountain Club), and four from more-local governing
groups (e.g., community and regional development offices, Berk-
shire Visitor's Bureau). The essential task of this group has been to
generate a mediating "concept," a broad-based consensual plan
for this land that could meet the ecologic and economic criteria of
all involved parties and the original state legislative act.

The formation of this committee was extremely significant for
several reasons. First, the government was acting as mediator
among the various interests, a position not adopted by others or
by the other available institutions in this case. Second, the forma-
tion of the advisory board put into one setting people who had
been advocating opposing decisions. As a result, the members of
the board could not simply rely upon the solidified codes outlined
above and be socially productive in this group, given its purposes.
The committee, acting as diplomatically as possible, was being
charged with generating newer, integrative "visions" that could
weave its various interests into a single cloth. In short, the compet-
ing groups were being "welded" into an official government
group, and as members of that group, together, they had to create
a discourse that both represented their own interests while incor-
porating the interests of the others. The formation of the board
then created a significant shift in motivational exigencies. Speaking
simple vested interests would not be sufficient to this task.
Could this group move itself—and help model for others how to
so move—from insular and competitive enclaves, from identities
of difference to an integrative community?

As a part of the committee's considerable task, they com-
missioned outside consultants' advice about this land. After receiving
the consultants' reports, the committee met in September 1992,
and not surprisingly, at that meeting, the proposals made by the
consultants largely fell prey to vested interests in terms of the two
codes outlined above. The one was being labeled "an Environ-
mental Education Center" and the other, "a Conference Center."
The former plan was of a small economic scale, ecologically
focused, and largely motivated by "an educational agenda." The
latter was of a larger economic scale and foregrounded a "profit
motive." Introducing these plans from "outside" consultants,
however, enabled significant symbolic movement by the com-
mittee, if ever so slight. It helped begin weaving the two codes into an
integrative "concept" that could create, possibly, the bases for a
decision that the committee sought and the wider public—and the
state government—anticipated.

The process of attempting to forge such a vision out of these
earlier codes and consultant plans has been, and continues to be a
long and tedious one and has produced—what the advisory board
has called—the "Greylock Center Concept Plan." The committee
noted in a recent (1994) document: "The concept plan is the result
of an eighteen month consensus building project." Neither the
language of the document, nor the process that produced it, can
be analyzed here in any detail, but I can mention that the concept
is now referred to as the "Greylock Center" and has "three main
components." These are "a conference center, an environmental
education center, and a variety of recreation areas and facilities."
These "will attempt to creatively integrate recreation, education,
and sustainable approaches to development" (p. 16 of the August
1993 "final draft"). In a 1994 letter to prospective developers
(recall this is a "public-private partnership"), Governor Weld cap-
tures the idea in this way:

The development of the Greylock Center is a public-private ven-
ture melding economic and environmental interests. As envi-
sioned, the Greylock Center will contain a full amenity confer-
ENCE CENTER, A RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER, AND A NETWORK OF YEAR-ROUND RECREATION AREAS AND FACILITIES, INCLUDING A CHAMPIONSHIP 18-HOLE GOLF COURSE. ALL DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES ARE ENCOURAGED TO UTILIZE STATE-OF-THE-ART ENERGY SAVING AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE TECHNOLOGY.

The "concept plan" created by the committee, then, is not so much the invention of a new idea as it is the bringing together into one "plan," a "centered plan," ideas—and identities—that were previously kept farther apart. This is by no means a meager accomplishment. The plan presents, and subsequently requires a discourse that affirms historically antagonistic codes, in various degrees, and thus attempts to carve into this social and natural scene some common ground. The process—if evolving ever so slowly, and in short—seeks an integration of the traditionally competing factions. Representatives of groups which the community cast as antagonists are now working together in the hope of producing such a joint decision. These current efforts are interesting in their attempts to forge for this public—at least for some period of time—a community-wide plan. Whether this can be done, and for how long, and whether this social drama has played its last major crisis, or will again rupture into a social schism—all of this remains to be seen.

DECISIONS, DRAMA, DIALECTICS, AND DEPICTIONS: THE WORK OF DISCURSIVE FORMS

Decisions undoubtedly involve individual predispositions and judgments. Yet, in order to formulate them, we draw from a complex discursive formation, and as we implement parts of it, we are drawn to some degree into that formation and the social identities it makes relevant. As I began inhabiting the symbolic world reported here, I soon realized my own initial "senses" about "the mountain" were only part of the picture. As mentioned earlier, I was deeply perplexed when I would mention "Greylock" (thinking, myself, of "the mountain") yet find others responding directly to me with a sometimes lengthy narrative about Adams' economic or political woes. I wondered: How can a mention of the "mountain" create a grand discourse about Adams, its history, and its political economy? By now, the reasons for this discourse, and the associated proposal for this land, should be clearer. From the one
view, I had asked about “Greylock . . . the town’s project”—not about the “mountain”—and was simply being instructed in a local way to understand it.

This exploration of a large discursive system can help us understand the ways decisions and depictions like these are not simply our own but are perhaps more like evolving ships upon a shifting communal sea. Given the state of the sea, we select—or realize in retrospect that we have selected—a vessel (a depictive discourse, or position of self) that is at least familiar, and perhaps to our liking. We ride it along and see how it navigates the waters through which we are moving. Eventually, we get some sense of our vessel both as we move in and with it, and as we begin seeing others—in other vessels—traveling along. We may learn, sooner or later, more deeply about our vessel, or that another vessel may serve us better, or that this vessel we are on, itself, has changed (or should change) its shape and its means (or motives) of propulsion. Traveling like this, our depictions as our identities are part of a shifting discursive scene, with its own geography, its own history, its own constraints upon what we can (and should) do, upon what indeed we “are” doing. As we move our lives along, deciding as we go, we realize similarly that our social identities are not simply in our hands, but are more largely a part of shifting seas and scenes, symbolic spaces that move through and sometimes engulf us. In each sea and scene are discursive practices, and they are instrumental in making us what we are, just as we struggle to make what we will of “them.” Cultural scenes span the vessels and seas that individuals inhabit, by spanning the personal and cultural conditions of life.

Some such geographic metaphor is particularly apt, I hope, at least for the case examined above. Each proposal that participants advocated earlier responded to its own storm of violation, thus forming both alliances and conflicting factions. Later, the grip of each vessel was loosened, with each moving slightly closer together, and eventually together into calmer seas, but also into uncharted territory. The more hostile scene had been recrafted with a more conjoint—if still strained—climate being somewhat in the air. This general process—the movement from violations, crises, and factions to attempts at redress and integrative efforts—demonstrates the social dramatic flow of this discursive process. Each phase of the drama carries with it its own rhetoric, its own plot, its own mode of enactment (Turner, 1974, 1980). Reflected
upon generally, the rhetoric of violation and crisis temporarily
gave way to a rhetoric of redress and integration, only sometimes
to precipitate further crises; the plot turned from antagonistic to
cooperative actions, with various ebbs and flows between these;
the modes of enactment were sometimes official and government-
tal, including legislative acts and advisory committees, and at
other times were more informal. The drama is, then, in this case,
of a large and particular discursive scene, with its various ships
and terrain, its shifting rhetorics, plots and subplots, and modes
of enactment.

The large-scale, dramatic process consists of discursive prac-
tices that create nothing less than various ways of being, relating,
and living-in-environments, of inhabiting social scenes and mate-
rial worlds (bodies included). Our senses of being, and of being
related, and of how we should act, and so on, are being crafted
from discursive systems—like these seas—and from discursive
codes—like these vessels—that we can more or less select from,
and create with. Which discourse is being used is partly a matter
of habit, but is also possibly a matter, at least at some times, of
individual choice. And thus it was for those in this case who con-
sciously decided, for example, to purge “the project” from their
vocabulary, and thus to fight on for “the mountain,” as a matter
of principle, knowingly recreating a conflicted and contentious
scene. Others made decisions about the issues more privately,
unwilling to talk much about them, knowing a few words would
say much more than they desired. If people would talk, they often
expressed their concerns more in one code than the other, some-
what bewildered when the dramatic contest played out, yet again,
and again, and again in a seemingly unstoppable process. As
they’d say: “I wish people could just get along on this.” To “get
along” and bring people together meant, in this case, that one be
willing or able to understand not only one’s own code, but more-
over to speak in terms of both codes—and to create hybrid
codes—forcefully, in order to give each its due, and possibly iden-
tify each together. Indeed, the tide of the debate has been moving
this decision mostly between these conflicting vested interests—
with little common ground—for at least two decades now. It is
time, many say, to pull something together.

Understanding how this depictive process is working, and
being able to embrace its considerable importance, suggests then
that we envision decisions as discourses, and further hear how
these discourses are not only locally tailored, socially forceful, and individually applied, but are moreover consequential for our senses of identities, social relations, motives, and material living. Decisional discourses can thus be understood as being guided partly by our own rudders, with these helping to navigate particular vessels, seas, and terrain; that is, our decisions are partly our own to make. Yet also, these inevitably are part of the larger communicative climate and territory of our times. An ethnographic approach can thus help us understand not only our ruddered wills but also our contemporary worlds, and thus, to enable thinking of our discourses and identities with both the personal and the cultural in mind.

Focusing more upon the discourse of this community, we can see and better understand not only the general forms of decisional and dramatic processes, but a more specific one as well—in this case, verbal depictions of nature. In concluding, I will briefly elaborate the constituent features of this depictive form, mention several of its dialectical qualities, and discuss prospects for its use in future studies. The ways these dramatic and depictive discourses create identities of selves, motives for acting, and social relations among people will be, I think, of some future use (see Carbaugh, 1994, forthcoming).

The references to nature which are made by these people during this land-use drama demonstrate how a small communicative form—the verbal depiction of nature—is sometimes a very powerful symbolic expression. When this form is used, it can ignite a potent complex of sociocultural messages. First, with regard to a referential function, depictions make reference to a very specific physical place in a very specific way through the selection of a particular term(s) of reference (e.g., of "mountain" or "project"). To make reference to a place is to suggest to one's contemporaries that some place is worthy of attention (that physical place), that it can (and should) be attended to in this way (through this term of reference), and that it can (and should) be viewed from this physical location (the way the term physically places one for viewing). The communicative act of referencing nature thus invokes a complex of geographic messages: a place at which to look, a way of living with that place, and the optimal place from which to view it; all of this is getting said. The use of a depictive form(s) then, generates claims that are both about and from a physical place,
positioning one to see from a particular vantage point, into that place, and to live with it in a particular way.

Communicating about natural space further invokes a system of social personae through particular meanings. For example, the way "nature" is turned into an expressive means says something about the people who express it in that particular way. As a result, these expressions help construct not only typical personae, but also—when a part of a social drama—political factions, counter-actions, and the disparate motives deriving from each. Put differently, each social dramatic depiction of nature is heard as an avowal of some identity, while implicating another for others. Developers want a "project" in order to better the town's civic life; environmentalists want the "mountain" preserved in order to better the eco-life. Created through this dueling of depictions is a complex of identificational messages, of how the land (above or below), and people (outside or inside), could be and/or should stay.

Dialectical meanings are perhaps immanent in social-dramatic depictions of nature, as they powerfully integrate, through competing forms, a referencing of a physical world, a complex of cultural associations, including contesting personae, political factions, modes, and motives for action. This potent communicative process seems a prime candidate for what Basso (1988, p. 123) has called a "mini-maxing" phenomenon (the mini form being "the project" or "the mountain"), a cultural discourse in which "a few spoken words . . . accomplish large amounts of communicative work." Most noteworthy, as well, in this case, is the way in which a single depiction within this larger dramatic form can radiate, in a saying, two deeply dialectical codes (e.g., of cultural ecology over local economy).

The dialectical complexity of the particular political issues involved here can become particularly convoluted for American audiences. The contemporary, two-party political scene is often cast, on a national scale, as a drama between the "liberal Democrats" and the "conservative Republicans." Typically, the liberal left is heard to be champions of rights for the disadvantaged, the poor, and the environment. The conservative Republicans are heard to be champions of small government and private enterprise. In Adams, however, the dialectic between the political left and right worked in alliances that do not neatly fit these grand political images. The "environmental left" argued for preservation of the land as a common good for the people of the state.
They antagonized the local private business interests in the process. But also in the process they argued for "preservation" of a common good (the land) and a national heritage (the literary tradition). A perhaps unintentional consequence of this argument was the further muting of the disadvantaged: the economically deprived townsfolk of Adams. Stepping into this American picture from afar, one cannot help but puzzle over finding the liberal left arguing in ways that favor preserving tradition at the expense of disadvantaged locals! The conservative right, on the other side, argued for development of the land in order to help the local economy. They antagonized the environmentalists from elsewhere in the process. But in so doing, they argued for change of a local good (the land) and transformation of deprived people (the poor). The conservative republicans arguing for the disadvantaged, for change and transformation!

The untypical sound—to many American public ears—of these alliances and arguments demonstrates how general, cultural political images can shed very little light on local circumstances. One wonders further if general cultural slogans (e.g., "thinking globally") mitigate against or confuse subsequent local actions and interactions. Some of the most difficult dynamics in the above occurred when "global thinking" spoke over and above the local scene, making local circumstances almost impossible to hear. Abstract dialectics, and political discourses, and academic theories, untutored by local discourses, at times tower over such debates, and in the process do little to help us understand them.

While the symbolic meaning systems of primary concern in this essay are deeply local and conflicted, as part of a larger culturescape they also ignite other traditional American dualisms and dialectics. Some of these include the relative weighting and conception given to classic counterforces, such as (1) the impulse to transform versus the impulse to render permanent and stabilize; (2) the locus of the decision-making process, whether local, inside (of the town), or elsewhere, outside (by others); (3) the scope of the decision, whether short-term, or longer-term; (4) the site of the problem, whether of a community, a region, or a larger natural environment; (5) the different valuing of the political agents of village or town versus national or state government; (6) the ownership and use of land, whether private or public, conserved or preserved (see Oravec 1981, 1984); (7) the dialectic between motives for public policies, be they economic or ecologic, and whether
these can be simultaneously met. All such large concerns are woven into the fabric of the above conversational cloth. With each single thread, one weaves a hearable, potentially robust dialectical design—whether one wants it or not. One's heritage often speaks louder than one's will!

Running through all of these dualisms and tangles is some cultural version of a nature/culture distinction, some vacillating relation between the order of nature (or wildness) and the order of culture (or cultivation). How can one address and redress this apparently robust, bipolar categorization in cultural thought and action? Here, I think, is where further developing an approach to the study of cultural pragmatics, social identities, dramas, processes of decision making, and verbal depictions of nature can hold great promise.

First of all, to know people—who they are and how they are related—and the places they inhabit in a holistic sense—that is, to know how life is experienced and expressed in its place—is to know both a physical space and a cultural place. Knowledge is needed of the emphatically material and symbolic "there," of how each people plays its settling role. Not to recognize this is to blindly impose one's own symbolic orientation onto a "peopled place," where others are currently living. Focusing upon a "here," though not necessarily staying only "there," commits one to some degree of local knowledge—of people and their place—to knowing what is indeed there, both the local terrain and the ways that place is currently known to its people, or discursively coded by them. This point of departure is crucial not only because indigenous people and places, like the Hopi (Johnson, 1991) and others (Mitchell, 1991), have fallen prey to outsiders' foreign interests, but also because all living is of some region or place, and is to a degree unique unto itself, and its people. To know, then, is to go "there" to that peopled place and experience it. It is to discover, while there, the cultural space which that place holds for those who inhabit it.

To know the local system, one needs a framework for discovering, describing, and interpreting it. Through ethnographic field work, one can come to know the discursive ways in which a people inhabit and play out dramas about a place, the space that place holds in their lives, what they see in it, with it, and seek from it. By listening to the ways places (including bodies) are depicted, and their geographic positioning through a complex of cultural asso-
ciations (historical, economic, political, and social), one can gain access into local places and lives. Depictions of nature thus help bring into view the relative weighting, and potential antagonisms between the experiencing of nature's space and the cultural expressions of that place, exploring what both permit. By exploring depictions, we can see and hear with an integrative double allegiance, asking of this natural place and space what it permits, and of this people what they have made of it and themselves. Assessments, such as decisions, depictions, and cultural pragmatic studies about them, would be grounded, then, in natural and cultural discourses, permitting knowledge which is in, or seeking, balance.