THE SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING:

A NEW DIRECTION FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

A Thesis

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Daniel N.H. Roth

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ABSTRACT

Literature on progressive community organizing tends to focus on building powerful relationships and other social dimensions. In addition to building relationships, community organizers appear to make choices about space and place in their practice, and have meaningful spatially situated experiences. Due to the under-theorization of space and place in scholarship on community organizing, the spatial dimensions of community organizing are often unseen. This study situates community organizing within a fuller context that includes the spatial dimensions to help us understand what organizers actually do.

Through an ethnographic case study and narrative inquiry this thesis first considers how organizers from a rural community-based energy efficiency project experienced the spaces and places in their communities. Through their narratives we hear how emotions, meaning, history, power, and choice are several dimensions of how organizers experience everyday spaces and places. Secondly, the thesis examines community organizing as a spatial practice in light of earlier research on free space, power as performance, and world traveling.

The conclusions have implications for both the practice and theory of organizing. The research supports the notion that organizing is indeed relational work, but is additionally a spatial practice. As a spatial practice, community organizing has the potential to create or embellish spaces and places where people can build power together. Additionally, the conclusions propose a new emphasis on effective spatial practice in trainings and writings for community organizers.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Daniel N.H. Roth was born in 1979 and raised in Albany, NY. Until 1997, he could be found hanging out with friends on street corners and in the city parks. Although a city boy at heart, Daniel's second homes are the mountains, farms, and lakes of Vermont. In 2001, he received a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies from New York University for his studies in cultural ecology and environmental education. Today, Daniel lives in Eco Village at Ithaca.

As an instructor Daniel has worked in the field of youth development and experiential education for nine years. As a project coordinator and community organizer he has developed campus based social and economic justice campaigns, broad-based community partnerships, sustainability education programs, and civic engagement projects.

Daniel is the founding coordinator of Ithaca Car Share. He is co-founder of the Youth Action Team of the US Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development and is a member of the US Partnership board of directors. In addition Daniel is a massage therapist and somatic movement educator. Daniel deeply enjoys connecting with diverse people and places, creative expression, and healthy food. His life mission is in service to the integration of healing and large-scale social transformation through the cultivation of a compassionate and playful spirit.

For the ancestors who have passed,

the soldiers of compassion and justice who pass daily, &

Millard Clements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Chapter One: Introduction

Progressive social movements in modern America use many strategies, including community organizing, to enliven democratic public life and civic action at the grassroots level. Ed Chambers, a career organizer and trainer, explains, "When our government does not work… it is the responsibility of citizens… to organize" (Chambers 2006; 57). Chambers, and the national coalition of grassroots community organizations he leads, promote a particular style of "relational" organizing. Strong relationships, and meetings that build these ties, are at the core of their work. Building on the relational approach, this research expands our attention so as to include the physical world where organizing practice takes on shape and form. Through these pages we consider how community organizers experience space and place, and how a view of organizing as a spatially-situated practice can enhance our understanding of what organizers actually do.

Professionals and academics in business, politics, and education have already begun to move in this direction. Where people sit in business meetings, the arrangements of classrooms, and the shapes of negotiating tables are all topics that teachers, managers, and diplomats are thinking about more then ever. In the last year, Business Week published an article titled "You are where you sit" to remind business leaders of the intersections of power, personality, and space that play out around the meeting tables of our workplaces. In 1993, renowned educator Parker Palmer reminded teachers "When the chairs are arranged facing the lectern, row upon row … [the] arrangement speaks. It says that in this space there is no room for students to

relate to each other ... no invitation to a community … there is no hospitality." (p. 75).

Looking further back to the 1970's, one may remember that for several weeks the world's attention was focused on the question, "What will be the shape of the table for the Vietnam peace negotiations?" Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger surely knew what negotiation expert Henry S. Kramer wrote 30 years later, "Table shape and location may be a critical preliminary matter… carrying important symbolic significance" (p. 215). The work ahead for those concerned with community organizing is to bring such a spatial alertness into our own theories and practices. There is urgency to this work for "the spatial dimension of our lives has never been of greater practical political relevance than it is today" (Soja 1996; 1).

Until recently, literature on organizing has primarily focused on social, historical, and economic dimensions. Consequently, this body of literature does not adequately consider how community organizing plays out within the everyday spaces and places of our communities. Although the literature remains inattentive to the spatial dimensions of organizing, organizers themselves are full of common knowledge and experience about the complex physical realities of their work. As one might imagine, organizers make use of everyday places such as living rooms, corner stores, and churches to bring diverse people together around pressing issues.

In the following pages I draw on the accounts of community organizers to help us consider the spatial dimensions of their practice. In particular this exploratory, qualitative research considers how community organizers personally experience space and place. Organizers interviewed for the research were invited to speak meaningfully about their work, where it takes

place, and their experiences in those particular places. The themes that emerge from these deeply personal stories and reflections are then teased apart to help us reveal the spatial practices alive in community organizing that have been overlooked in past research and writing. This research on the spatial dimensions of community organizing enables a fuller, multi-dimensional conception of organizing that builds on the strengths of relational organizing and begins to expose the hidden roots of the tradition.

A fuller appreciation of organizing as a spatial practice is valuable for both researchers and practitioners. For organizers (many who are already well aware of how space matters) bringing spatial practices into the light will mean a new frontier for dialogue and training. For example, if someone's experience of a particular meeting space is deeply meaningful this can affect the durability of relationships, commitments, and leadership that keep a project moving forward. Or when an organizer is out in a neighborhood engaging residents the ability to anticipate which locations will feel welcoming can make or break a project. Attention to such spatial dimensions allows organizers the chance to identify a whole new set of constraints and opportunities.

Scholars of social movements, social change, and grassroots democracy would also benefit from such considerations on a theoretical level. In theoretical terms, space and place are often considered separately from social phenomena. The social, relational realm is often contrasted with the static, physical reality of objects and buildings. In novel ways, a consideration of spatial practices in community organizing opens us to research at the intersection of the relational and physical domains of community life. Indeed, we will hear from scholars who propose that an integration of these domains

is the next leap forward in social research. A theoretical consideration of community organizing as both a relational and spatial practice allows new avenues for researchers to understand the intersections of emotion, identity, choice, and power as they converge in spatial dimensions of everyday places.

The research designed to consider these topics emerged from a year of ethnographic fieldwork. During this year I worked among community organizers and residents in a rural New York county on the Heating Solutions Project. Our independent, volunteer efforts spread across a handful of townships focused on grassroots organizing to increase home energy efficiency and save people money. After sixth months of immersion as an organizer myself, I interviewed seven organizers working on the Heating Solutions Project in separate townships around the county. Over several months that followed these in-depth, transcribed interviews were distilled into a series of practice stories and reflections on specific themes. Through these narrative accounts I began to learn about how organizers experience everyday settings and how their practice is spatially situated.

The first pattern that emerged from across all the interviews that seemed consistent with my own field experience was the distinction between planning meetings and public outreach. These activities represented two distinct strategies in the Heating Solutions Project. As I spent time with the transcripts it became clear that planning and outreach took place in different locations, elicited different experiences from organizers, and had fairly distinct practical goals. Based on these experiences a substantial portion of the research presented on the organizers' experiences of space and place is divided into two sections on planning and outreach.

With nuance and detail, the organizers I interviewed described a variety of places used for planning meetings, including business offices, town halls and homes. The organizers spoke of spaces they created for outreach within community events, diners, corner stores, and the doorsteps of homes. Overall, their experiences highlighted how emotions, personal histories, power, and political choices played out in the spatial dimensions of their communities. Through their stories I heard how the personal, social, historical, and spatial dimensions of life converge.

The stories and reflections of the organizers presented in this research offer a compelling voice for other scholars and organizers to imagine how space and place really matter. The potency of this spatial frame crystallizes when these experiences are viewed alongside earlier research on free spaces (King and Hustedde 1993), transformational margins (hooks 1990), situated interaction (Goffman 1959, Giddens 1984), world traveling (Coles 2004) and power as a spatial performance (Kesby 2005). Through these theoretical lenses we can see how the "relational" tradition could be complemented with a deepened appreciation for the spatial dimensions of organizing. The view of organizing as a spatial practice exposes the potential for organizers to open up, carve out, make available, and transform spaces and places where people can build powerful relationships. This view does not suggest that space determines relationship, but simply that relationship takes form through space while space takes on meaning through relationship.

In the thesis that follows I return to all of these themes. Chapter Two details the complex relationship between the researcher and the researched. My own narrative as both a community organizer and a social researcher sets the stage. This "research journey" invites the reader to walk with me as I

stumbled into my current appreciation for the dynamism between building relationships and space. My autobiography serves as a "narrative beginning" for the stories of other organizers that follow.[1] To begin with my own story locates the research appropriately in the context of my own life history, perspective, and research agenda. The reader and I travel together for several months following my questions like breadcrumbs. The trail leads us through many new experiences, relationships, and everyday places. The chapter ends with a review of the research methodology and narrative approach used in the research.

In Chapter Three we turn to the practice stories and reflections of seven diverse community organizers from the Heating Solutions Project. Each organizer's accounts are introduced with brief background information. The practice stories generally begin with personal histories and broad goals for social change in their communities. These introductions help contextualize the accounts of the Heating Solutions Project within the organizer's lives. The second half of each account focuses on specific organizing experiences in particular spaces and places. Overall the chapter is organized around the physical spaces and places where planning and outreach occurred. Each section is followed by themes that emerged from accounts of that particular type of space and place.

Part one of Chapter Three, "Spaces and places of planning", focuses on the organizers' experiences of planning meetings in formal sites including town halls and business offices; and planning meetings in homes. Several of these planning meetings consisted of members from a single local

[1] Clandinin & Connelly (2000) propose that a researcher's autobiography is an essential starting point to ground a narrative inquiry where the researcher has been embedded in relationships with the study participants.

organization working together to coordinate their efforts. In other meetings community leaders from different groups came together. Part two "Spaces and places of outreach" turns to accounts of public outreach efforts that emerged from the initial planning meetings in the various townships. The organizers describe their attempts to engage the broader public by going out into more unfamiliar and unpredictable settings. Outreach took place in community events such as a monthly fish fry and a neighborhood youth event; businesses such as a town diner and a corner store; and the doorsteps of homes.

Chapter Four "Organizing as Spatial Practice" explores the themes that emerged from the accounts of planning and outreach. These themes are considered in light of earlier research. The infusion of theory gives us a sense of how space and place matters to the broader work community organizing outside of Tompkins County. Throughout the chapter the narratives enhance existing theories and writings with rich, meaningful examples.

Lastly, the conclusion looks back on the overall research project and my own personal journey of discovery. The first section reminds the reader that spatial dimensions are often devalued and obscured in modern cultures. The chapter then evaluates our progress on the central questions of how organizers experience space and place, and what we can learn from organizers' experiences, stories, and reflections about the spatial dimensions of community organizing.

Much of the chapter focuses on organizing as a spatial practice and the value of a holistic perspective to support such an integration of relational, historical, and spatial domains. The chapter ends with suggestions of novel ways both organizers and academics can deepen their appreciation of spatial

dimensions, and enhance future trainings and writings on community organizing.

Chapter Two: An Organizer's Research Journey

Of a sudden,
a shift in the light,
Turns the window we looked through
into a mirror.
And we see not the world
but ourselves.

-Phillip L. Wagner from *Each Particular Place: Culture and Geography* (2000)

2.1 Personal Background

I have been an organizer for over nine years, first as a campus based student

organizer and later as a community-based organizer[1]. Nearly three years ago I

entered an intensive period of critical reflection on my own practice of

community organizing. I began to question things I had once taken for

granted. Through a combination of graduate studies and on-the-ground

community organizing I was able to slowly peel away several layers of my

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[1] Community organizing in the context of the United States generally relates to an array of practices arising from diverse social movements, that often seek to strengthen "public relationships" and build power (Gecan 2002;21, Chambers 2006) in order to focus on increasing 'community control' over decision making (Warren &Warren 1997; 33) and mobilize resources (Tilly 1978) toward concrete improvements to the communities (Warren 2001; 9). Both federally funded community development institutions such as Cooperative Extension (Peters 2006), and radical grassroots networks, such as the Industrial Areas Foundation (Chambers 2006) embrace the role of community organizing to achieve the promise of inclusive and participatory democracy. Community organizing has taken many shapes and forms within diverse social movements including the civil rights movement (Payne 1995), the feminist movement (Stanley & Wise 1983), the environmental justice movement (Fischer 2000), and the field of participatory community development (Peters 2006, Flora 2000, Burkey 1996). In each movement the practice of community organizing takes on a new face and often serves a variety of strategic purposes based on the constellation of issues that most directly affect any given community.

own working assumptions. After eight years of practice and this intensive three-year phase, I began to ask questions about the importance of space and place in the practice of community organizing. How do organizers feel in the places they work? How do they think practically about space and place to forward their agenda? How do spaces and places impact the work of community organizing? Why don't books on community organizing ask critical questions about the places where the work happens? These questions drove my desire to learn more about the spatial dimensions of community organizing in the county where I lived, learned, and worked.

Eventually, through a 12-month immersion as a community organizer in the project detailed in this thesis, I saw how community organizing is much more than building powerful relationships. Over these months my grounded, ethnographic field work and in depth interviews with other organizers opened me to the complex ways that organizers experience space and place and how these spatial dimensions matter to the practice of community organizing. This cycle of research and practice exposed me to hidden dimensions of community organizing.[2] I came to understand how community organizers have meaningful stories to share that tell us about how space and place matter. In turn, I discovered the cultural and academic traditions that portrayed community in a different light. [3]

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[2] The anthropological work of Edward Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), proposed the study of 'proxemics' to illuminate people's use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture. His research uncovered how different cultural groups inhabit different sensory realities in relation to space. He admits that America's acultural and assimilationist tendencies, i.e. the melting pot ideal, result in an undeveloped awareness of how people from different classes, races, and geographies relate to space. Through our inattention to difference in spatial relations we thwart our ability to communicate with each other effectively across lines of power and difference.

[3] In social research building of power and inclusive relationships are generally described as a linear, temporal 'enlightenment' process (Kesby 2005). The noticeable dominance of a temporal conception of building power is rooted in a deep modern preponderance with

2.2 Arriving in town

I moved to Ithaca, New York 3 years ago. I landed in the urbanized center of rural Tompkins County to study community development and community organizing at Cornell University. Before my arrival I was a community organizer for 2 years on a rural island in Washington State, and a student organizer in New York City for 4 years. In Washington and New York I learned the value of building relationships and understanding local histories. Consequently, when I hit the ground in Tompkins County I started to build informal relationships with organizers. I volunteered for a new non-profit that had formed to advance sustainable community development in Tompkins County.[4] My sensibilities told me that a network of trusted relationships would be a foundation for effective work. I was not surprised when my volunteer time with Sustainable Tompkins led me into relationships with a network of diverse community organizers in Tompkins County.

Through Sustainable Tompkins I became acquainted with the executive director of Tompkins County Cooperative Extension who eventually hired me

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historical progress highlighted by Karl Marx's emphasis on historical materialism and continued throughout most social theory. (Lefebvre 1991; 21). Foucault argued that the "devaluation of space" in modern social thought encouraged scholars to "treat space as dead, fixed, undialectical, and immobile" (1984, 70). Such treatment would explain the lack of serious consideration and integration of spatial factors and dimensions into any social inquiry, particularly research and writing on community organizing. In response to this tendency, scholar Dick Hebdigdge observed "a growing skepticism concerning older explanatory models based in history has led to a renewed interest in the relatively neglected 'under-theorized' dimension of space." (Soja 1991)

[4] In *Toward Sustainable Communities* (1998), Mark Roseland details how sustainable development is often used as an umbrella concept for the integration of social justice, environmental health, and economic prosperity. Over the last 9 years of community organizing I learned that groups working for a 'sustainable future' often attempt to bring together diverse interest groups and constituencies to plan development strategies that work for everyone in the community.

as a research assistant for a climate change and renewable energy

collaboration. Through my continued involvement in Sustainable Tompkins

over 2 years and my work on the climate change project I built up trust with

community organizers, researchers, extension agents, local leaders, and

residents around the county.[5] Over the first two and half years of my

community organizing and extension work in Tompkins County I was

focused on how trusted relationships, open communication, resource

mobilization, and good timing aided our efforts on various energy related

issues.[6] That set of assumptions began to crack open when I agreed to work

with a Cornell research team and the Heating Solutions Project to organize

residents in two low-income, rural mobile home parks.

I have never lived in a mobile home park. I am a well-traveled city kid,

accustomed to the ins and outs of urban poverty. The mobile home parks of

rural central New York were new territory. I could stand among a mix of 150

rusted and new homes, packed tightly together with old model cars, kid's

bikes, and miscellaneous yard decorations and look across a cow pasture or

peer into a thick forest. I was no longer among the row houses and apartment

complexes of cities. In these new places, my assumptions about the primacy of

building relationships began to crack. In part, the stark differences between

the spaces and places where I was comfortable, and the mobile home parks of

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[5] The story I just relayed is an intentional example of how a narrative account of community organizing can privilege 'relationship' over any detailed spatial context by simply leaving out references to any specific places where human interactions occur. Did you notice? Nearly every organizer I interviewed would speak in a similar spatially dislocated way until I started repeatedly asking "so where did that happen?"

[6] Only 6 months before I initiated the current research I wrote an article titled "Working Together: A Narrative Inquiry into Community Collaboration" that focused on planning conversations, community collaborations, and social learning with no consideration of the spaces where these activities took place.

Tompkins County pushed me to reconsider my assumptions about what mattered.

2.3 Getting down to work

The opportunity to work in two low-income, rural neighborhoods emerged during the winter of 2006. The director of the Tompkins County Cooperative Extension suggested that I join an ongoing Cornell research project. The research team was studying participatory strategic planning in low-income communities. The researchers had asked him to identify a local project that engaged low-income residents. They wanted to research a participatory process designed to increase local control of decisions that affected under-served people's lives.[7] The director informed the research team about a community organizing project he had helped start called the Heating Solutions Project. Familiar with my professional background, he suggested the research team hire me to be a Heating Solutions organizer and to document the practice of community organizing. The extension director also expressed

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[7] As stated in the original research proposal the research team was concerned with "Strategic Planning for Community Development: Examining Long Term Community Capacity Building." Their main focus was on how "the participatory process unfolds", and "how the work gets done" of engaging communities of residents in problem solving and building local capacities to respond to pressing issues. The research team's theoretical focus was explicitly on social learning, social network formation, and power. This research focus was consistent with my understanding at that time of 'what matters' in community organizing. Consequently the research and the organizing strategy revolved around the questions about "who knows who" and "what happens in planning meetings?" Not until months later did I begin to see what was missing from both the research question and my approach to community organizing.

hope that the research could support the improvement of the Heating Solutions Project.

The Heating Solutions Project was inspired by a model of community organizing around residential energy efficiency developed in Madison, Wisconsin during the early 1990s.[8] The organizing goal was to strengthen local residents' capacity to help each other deal with residential energy efficiency improvements, and build local leadership and inclusive, grassroots power that, in time, could help tackle other stubborn social issues.[9] Similar to the entire nation Tompkins County had seen fuel prices for both transportation and home heating dramatically increase over the past two years. Many local leaders knew that low-income and at-risk residents would be the first to be negatively impacted.

The extension director described this local crisis as an opportunity to build local capacity and power; "we thought this situation was just a huge

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[8] The Extension had learned about this model of community organizing on energy issues from a similar community based energy project in Wisconsin described in "Madison Gas and Electric's Neighborhoods Energize Wisconsin Program: Training Manual (1995)

[9] The Heating Solutions Project was a locally planned initiative that emerged from several months of local leaders working together. The pilot phase of the Heating Solutions Project was carried out during the winter of 2005/2006. The pilot phase was a non-formal outreach program that focused on community professionals and residents in general. The work of Heating Solutions was primarily volunteer-driven and volunteers reported on the project's progress to the full alliance on an ad-hoc basis. According to the project's literature the goals of the Heating Solutions included: 1) Ensure that EVERYONE in a given neighborhood has access to and understands the information on how to save energy and money with low-cost and no-cost practices that are relatively easy to implement. 2) Provide opportunities for each household that wants to do this work, but either for financial or physical reasons is unable to implement the practices, to have the necessary work done in their homes.3) Use this process to identify and strengthen local leaders and social networks in each neighborhood, to be applied to other important issues in the neighborhood. 4) Use this process to gather information on the condition of houses in the neighborhoods, and make use of the information and the networks to deliver larger-scale weatherization opportunities more efficiently to all neighborhoods in the county.

opportunity for really helping people to grow together, to unite together around a common theme, a common issue. Through working on that issue, they could begin to develop and strengthen their own networks in their communities and their own leadership skills" (Peters 2006; 128).[10]

After several rounds of negotiations in the conference rooms of our academic department I was hired. No one, including myself, seemed too concerned that I had never spent any time in these mobile home parks. I knew how to build relationships with people, and that was what mattered. Once I was hired, the extension director, the primary researcher, and myself had a planning meeting to discuss the project. The meeting was held in a small conference room in the academic department of the lead researcher. I was also a student in this department.

While sitting around a large wooden table, surrounded by academic plaques and a dry erase board, we began to plan our approach to working in these far-off communities. From that conference room we discussed a strategy to identify residents who were 1) respected in the community, 2) knew the neighborhood, and 3) interested in energy issues. I would support these 'street captains' to engage other residents in a variety of efforts such as community

[10]Based on the published narrative in *Catalyzing Change* by Scott Peters (2006) and my own in-depth interviews and planning conversations with the director of Tompkins County Cooperative Extension and the director of the Tompkins County Department of Social Services, I learned how in the fall of 2005 a handful of local human-service leaders were brought together by the Tompkins County Cooperative Extension (TCCE) in an attempt to collaboratively respond to the potential energy crises and the negative impacts on local residents. As presented in "Smarter, Cleaner, Stronger in New York: Secure Jobs, A Clean Environment, and Less Foreign Oil (2004) Over the past few years, working families in New York have struggled to keep up with soaring and erratic energy prices. With a tank of gasoline in 2004 costing 39 percent more than it did in 2002 and natural gas prices 19 percent higher, consumers were spending an ever-growing portion of their household budgets on basic energy needs. Then in 2005 according to the National Labor Review (2006) and the New York State Energy and Gas Corporation newsletter (2005) both the nation, and all of New York State experienced a jump in home heating prices on the level of 20 to 40 percent.

surveying, hosting workshops by local energy specialists, and organizing volunteers to help families and individuals who were most at risk (financially or physically) by the rise in energy.

During that initial planning meeting, the extension director put forward the importance of going out to the community to do outreach at senior centers, youth church groups, and tabling at local centers and events. Outreach in this sense was not just about good communication, optimizing resources, building relationships, and recruiting local participants, it was about hitting the streets as soon as possible.

The director suggested that as soon as the project team "hit the streets" to survey homes and meet potential street captains, we should begin to build familiarity with the community. These instructions sparked my questions. What activities would we do, and where? What would being in those places feel like? What meaning would it have for me, and the residents I engaged? The extension director left several 'how to' booklets with us that day.[11] The booklet reviewed the process of going door to door in the neighborhood and gave a suggestion of an opening line to use with residents. There were no words of wisdom in regard to the types of community sites where planning with residents and outreach could take place. The actual sites for our work would be discovered later.

Later that same day, after meeting with the researcher and the extension director, I participated in a countywide planning meeting of the Heating Solutions Project. I traveled down the hill from Cornell to a conference room at the Tompkins County Cooperative Extension. I had been

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[11] See Appendix one: Process for Door to Door, Community by Community Campaign document

to dozens of meetings in that same room during my time in Tompkins County. When I joined the meeting about 15 people were seated around a long, and wide rectangular table.

I recognized many faces as directors of various social service groups in the county, and others who were community organizers, local leaders, and several new faces. As I walked in, several people acknowledged me with a quick head nod. Although the room was packed full of people, all of them focused on the discussion, the experience of being recognized immediately made me feel safer. The room was familiar to me, and I knew other people there respected my work. I felt like an insider. I quickly found a seat at the table to join the conversation.

I quickly noticed that everyone seemed to have a sense of urgency around the issue of rising winter heating costs. All of the participants who spoke sounded willing and ready to take action in collaboration with others to have an impact on this issue around the county. Through status reports from active residents and community leaders from around the county I learned how the Heating Solutions model for neighborhood engagement and organizing was being implemented. After a few minutes I was invited to introduce myself to the group. I described my new work with the Cornell research team to engage local mobile home parks in the Heating Solutions Project and to document the overall project.

After my introduction, several other participants spoke about the importance of engaging trusted people, reconnecting people in communities, and building information systems for easier access to resources. Soon the discussion shifted toward ways of sharing information with the public. I suggested that we ask the residents, "Where do people go to get trusted

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information?" After a few minutes of discussion on this point the group

agreed that such a "where" question could be answered through informal

surveying. The critical question was to ask, "Who are the key nodal points

within a given community?" The question of "where" seemed to take a back

seat to the question of "whom." This was my first day of organizing with the

Heating Solutions Project.

Only months later, after reviewing my notes of that meeting, did I

realize the unspoken message behind the how-to document and the group's

priorities. Information and relationships were more important than location.

In time I came to see that the materials from the original Wisconsin project

made no recommendations for where an organizer would do outreach or hold

planning meetings. Other guidebooks I read briefly mentioned the

accessibility of the space (regarding handicap participants and travel options),

bathrooms, and good lighting.[12] At most some guidebooks would briefly

mention the value of meeting with community members "on their own turf"

as a means to strengthen relationships and group ownership of the project.[13]

After reviewing over a dozen recommended publications for organizers I was

convinced that few writers in the field of community organizing took space

and place seriously.

Over the course of the project and subsequent research on the

experiences of other organizers I learned how space and place have a funny

way of being pushed to the background in both practice and theory. I

discovered through interviews and readings that organizers themselves and

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[12] For two examples of a common treatment of space and place in community organizing see
the 'checklists' in *Building Common Ground: Training Guide* (1994; 2-16) *and Community Voices:
Introduction to the Program and to Participatory Training* (1993; 24)
[13] The 'turf' topic is broached in *Building Communities of Support for Families* (1990; 30)

researchers of social change alike have a strong bias toward the importance of communication, relationship, timing, and resources.

2.4 Revealing the habits of organizers

For several months into my time as a Heating Solutions organizer our small 'mobile home park' team continued to plan our efforts from conference rooms and offices. In between meetings, email was the preferred mode of communication. Planning meetings often occurred in the conference room of a local social service agency. The mission of this agency was to provide services to low-income families in the county. Their programs touched most people in the county who lived in mobile home parks. They were interested in how the Heating Solutions Project could be integrated into their existing services and fill some of the gaps they could not. They generously offered their conference rooms for our early planning meetings.

We invited other people to participate in the meetings. We invited people with friends in the mobile home parks and people who grew up there. Few came. The agency was nearly thirty minutes from the mobile home parks where invited participants lived, and fifteen minutes from where most of them worked. Most of our planning meetings involved the researchers and the social service staff. We did the best with whoever showed up to develop a strategy to engage the community residents themselves. Although at first I thought we were on the right track, I increasingly became wary of how we were only meeting at the university and the social service agency.

Now looking back we could hardly have chosen meeting places more physically removed from the parks or more formal. We were attempting to organize from distant and exclusive spaces. Places that even well connected, interested volunteers reported they struggled to come to. One meeting participant who was accustomed to working with mobile home park residents, in facilities near the parks, was "shocked" by the scale and professionalism of the social service building. The participant acknowledged the value of having the meeting in the agency, because it was a good place to get an agenda done. Her feelings were a clue to the disconnection between the formality of the planning meeting site and the neighborhoods we were talking about.

In a strategy to identify street captains I made several attempts to meet residents in places they frequented. This strategy brought me to the site of an after school youth program that served only youth from a mobile home park. I quickly learned that the youth program site was filled with the distractions of children running around while the parents' presence was unpredictable. Although the site was not an ideal space for communication and planning it was a place to meet residents and gauge their interest in the project. In two weeks I successfully engaged six mothers at the youth program site. They all expressed interest in the street captain work. After meeting them, I tried for several months to work with them through phone call check-ins. The relationships moved very slowly. The parents were rarely home and often too busy to talk. I had lots of time, but I was nervous about driving out to the park where the parents lived.

I felt uncomfortable going into the community without an invitation. I began calling more often with no luck. At first I was reluctant to drive out to

the community to make house visits, but as time went by I knew something needed to shift. The shift came when it dawned on me that the project might fall on its face if I did not start spending time in the mobile home parks. I had been working on the project for 3 months when it became abundantly clear that without traveling out to the community, without having local hosts for our meetings, without bringing the planning meetings out from the conference room into the mobile home park and its environs, without taking the risk of feeling like the outsider in a rural neighborhood, and without exposing myself to the complex webs of power in an unfamiliar place, our goal of building local capacities would be unattainable. That spring in Tompkins County is when I began to ask critical questions about the spatial dimensions of community organizing.

From the day of my first visit to a mobile home park, I felt like an outsider in a marginalized and deprived place. Unlike the density and grinding traffic sounds of cities, I was standing in sight of cow pastures, streams, and green forests.[14] Many of the residents I met claimed to be just passing through the mobile home park. They weren't settling down. They were just trying to get their feet on the ground. Others who had lived there for longer usually had family roots in the surrounding farming communities.[15]

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[14] A comprehensive study by Rupasingha and Goetz for the United States Department of Agriculture (2003) calls attention to the stubbornness of poverty in rural communities despite decades of intervention. In 1999 over 75% of all counties in the United States with family poverty rates 50% higher than the national average were rural counties. According to the 1999 and 2004 national census the mobile home parks are located in sub-county region of Tompkins County with 25% -75% higher family poverty rates then national averages.
[15] In *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places: Change, Identity, and Survival in Rural America* (1991), anthropologist Janet Fitchen presents ethnographic research collected between 1985 to 1990 on upstate rural New York. Through her extensive research we learn how these rural communities have been going through economic and social changes over the last 50 years that have fundamentally altered both the physical and social landscape. The regional farm economy, once heavily populated with small family farms has dramatically decreased while sub-urbanized residential developments have gobbled up farm land around larger towns to

Residents I met were often not proud of the community. I interviewed one young woman named Nancy who grew up in one of the parks and ran the youth program I mentioned above. Nancy and I eventually worked together in the parks. She spoke to me during an interview about growing up in the park. "I got to experience a lot of what it's like to be in a confined space, a place that quite frequently people looked down upon. Its not really the home you dream of ever having, or letting people know where you live…heating would be terrible. We'd be very cold. I'd be hunched over the heating vent in the morning trying to get warm…it was just never a home that you had much pride in."

When I stepped out of the places familiar to an urban-raised, middle class, and formally educated white man onto the unpaved winding streets of a mobile home park, I came face to face with the social divisions and inequities of Tompkins County. The mobile home parks were only minutes from the research labs of Cornell University. The planes that took ivy-league students on spring break, and jetted businesswomen and men into New York City and Philadelphia, flew low overhead as they prepared to land. A rural county that looked fairly homogenous in racial terms, turned out to be painfully segmented along lines of class and culture.

These divisions were alive in the historical and spatial patterns of Tompkins County. They played out in the relationships among various groups and individuals. From many informal conversations and interviews with organizers and residents familiar with Tompkins County, I learned about

serve the housing needs of urban service sector employment. Within this context mobile home parks have provided affordable housing options for low-income, working class rural populations, many of who are not interested in living in cities but need to be near urban centers for employment.

politically progressive, and more urban-centered factions struggling with rural-focused conservative groups for political and social leadership. They spoke about historically low-income groups such as small-scale farmers, racial minorities, and other working class families who ran up against the economic power and determination of a small number of wealthy residents.[16]

A middle aged organizer named Gabriella who had lived in the county for thirty years explained to me in the middle of an interview, "The people who have been here for a long time resent the newcomers, even though the old timers who have sold off the land let the newcomers in. So there's not a lot of intermixing." Another organizer I interview named Anthony who was born and raised in a rural township nearby went further to say, "Families who have lived there for multiple generations…in many cases they have roads named after their ancestors. They are still living on the road of their last name. They are very distrustful of newcomers … [they] are distrustful of authority and new things that are beyond their control. They're afraid that you'll move into their town and change it."

My community organizing efforts landed me in a world filled with resentment between groups, uncertainty about who would maintain political power in the community, and an uncertain future. I had worked in tense situations before, and I had read about working in the midst of power struggles. Yet, I was not ready to fully appreciate how power and social divisions were taking place in the spaces and places of these mobile home parks and in the rest of Tompkins County. [17] Without a full appreciation of these dimensions I had signed up to travel into these new worlds of

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[16] These community tensions were consistently repeated in six of the seven in depth interviews and were consistent with dozens of informal conversations I have had with community members over the last three years.

[17] See Forester, *Planning in the Face of Power* (1999)

tension, power, and uncertainty. These were not my neighborhoods, but I had committed to building relationships with the residents who inhabited these places. In time, through reflection, study, and action, my awareness shifted.

2.5 Breaking habits

During those first months we tried to plan engagement strategies and build relationships through meetings in distant conference rooms. I spent only minimal amounts of time in the physical community. Instead I relied on telephone and email communication. The shift in my thinking that eventually came resulted in more 'spatial' planning conversations with the other project planners. To complement our initial strategy of identifying street captains, we began to identify the spaces in the neighborhoods that would be appropriate to interact with residents. We began to think about how these spaces could help us break through some of the power differences between our planning team and the residents. We started to ask how we could use spaces and places within the community to support our work.

As we considered how to proceed in the mobile home parks, feedback from the social service agency staff and the youth program leader suggested that door-to-door outreach strategies, suggested by the extension director, would be perceived as invasive and counterproductive. They explained that residents often dealt with annoying salesmen, marketers, and evangelists who appeared at their doors. Instead of a door-to-door strategy we envisioned a fun public event in a central space to help make residents feel welcomed. Our

'spatial' planning conversations led to a "Youth Fun Day" in the center of the mobile home park. The event attracted over 30 kids, teens, and parents.

Two of the parents I met during the Youth Fun Day agreed to help me organize a planning meeting to engage other residents. The meeting I planned with those two parents turned out to be the first planning meeting hosted by a local resident. We had the meeting on the porch of a parent's nearby summer cabin. The direct outcome of that planning meeting was the decision to organize an energy education workshop at the local church. This time, without much hesitation, I traveled to the church itself to interact with residents and church leaders on their own territory. In the end I spent several weekends at the church and even joined their Thanksgiving dinner. The workshop was held two months after our first local planning meeting and attracted 6 participants from the mobile home parks and 10 participants from the surrounding area. Over half the participants were excited to sign up as street captains.

The work of organizing residents in the mobile home parks was always about building relationships, but this experience brought my attention to how relationships, history, and emotions take shape within real, physical spaces. The community spaces we used were not neutral, unchanging stages where lives play out. The photos of Jesus on the walls of the local church, the academic plaques in the research department, the fancy ceiling panels of the social service conference room, the smell in the air of the mobile home park field, and the distance of our initial planning meetings from the neighborhoods were each meaningful in dynamic ways to the diverse people gathered in these spaces. These are just a few of the elements that comprise the spatial dimensions of community organizing.

These elements become important when we remember that in any given project community organizers make practical decisions about space and place all the time. Do we host a planning meeting in the center of the community or a few miles away? Do we invite residents into our homes or use town halls and conference rooms? What local diners or corner stores would be good places to start conversations with local residents? Should we approach people at their doorsteps or in the midst of a local festival? All these questions draw our attention to the choices that organizers often make when planning projects and engaging residents. Making choices about what spaces to use, how those spaces are experienced, and how to use them are choices. These are choices about who is hosting the event, who will feel intimidated or safe, and who will be included and excluded. These choices are not simply about the spaces themselves but reveal how organizers at times consider the interactions between different people and how they play out within a physical world.

2.6 Learning new habits

In my search for clues about these spatial dimensions of community organizers, I eventually discovered a rare example of the spatial perspective making its way into research on community organizing. King and Hustedde (1993), two staff members of the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, wrote about community participation in an environmental health project that highlighted how community organizers can create "free spaces" that support their goals of engaging and mobilizing residents. From their thick descriptions of these organizing spaces I learned about the "local community mementoes,

such as softball trophies" that decorated a local grocery store "creating a warm, friendly atmosphere" where "discussion took place daily among patrons gathered near the back of the store, seated on comfortable, movable, make-shift seating" (p. 2).

In this research, community organizers noticed that the grocery store was a place where older males dominated the informal public conversations about local and national issues. The organizers worked to "embellish" the site through interactive activities that engaged all patrons (men and women, young and old) and helped focus group discussions on possible actions that responded to the patron's assessments of the local environmental and social situation. In this case the organizers did not disturb the culturally familiar physical arrangements, but aimed to embellish the social dimension by 'opening up' the space to diverse patrons through facilitated activities.

In a separate case example, community organizers determined that all the possible "free spaces" such as the local courthouse, the Cooperative Extension offices, and other public settings were too "foreign or alienating" to most residents. A meeting in the local courthouse "would have been unfamiliar and more formal due to rigid, theatre-style seating and artificial hospitality arrangements." In this case, the organizers recognized that "homes are a good place to begin…Homes are comfortable, friendly, non-threatening settings that can bridge private and public life… a more natural community setting reduced tensions and gave [the diverse participants with various levels of political power] a greater sense of ownership of the problems and solutions" (p. 4).

First the organizers worked with local residents to host an informal gathering at a trusted persons home. Only after developing stronger

relationships and trust among residents through home meetings, did the residents and organizers host a potluck meeting for the broader community at the local fire station. The "tradition and ritual" of sharing food "can promote a sense of solidarity and cohesion." The potluck served to "transform" the space "making it safe for public talk… and [help residents] relate to each other on a personal level." In addition the organizers anticipated that hosting the event at the firehouse "symbolized the prior collective efforts taken [by residents of the community] to establish their volunteer fire department" (p. 5).

In each case, King and Hustedde detailed how community organizers worked alongside storeowners, residents, and volunteer firemen to create new free spaces and embellish the everyday places of the community. Although their ethnography focused on the spaces where organizing is physically situated they insisted that, "free space is more than physical space." In both examples organizers were aware of power differences within the community based on gender, age, and political position. The embellishment and creation of free spaces did not eliminate these dimensions of power. Yet the practice of opening up and claiming inclusive and participatory spaces may have helped local residents transform and reconfigure the existing power relations for the purpose of collective problem solving and building community power. [18]

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[18] More recently, researchers of participatory community development have located their analysis of building power with communities within the spatial frame as well (Hickey and Mohan 2004, p 16). In 'Retheorizing Empowerment-through-Participation as a Performance in Space', Kesby (2005) re-imagines his practice of organizing with women in Zimbabwe around HIV/AIDS issues through the frame of "performances of empowerment in space." He concludes that development agencies, community organizers and academics will fail to build new, and sustainable democratic power in communities without an understanding of how their work is situated within the everyday spaces and places that are drenched in contested power. Kesby proposes that only through a more sophisticated understanding of how organizers, and residents use space and place to reaffirm and/or reconfigure and transform existing power relations can we succeed in the larger project of building participatory and inclusive power. In the most practical sense, Kesby articulates the importance of repeatedly opening up, claiming, and transforming spaces on the margins, both real and imagined,

Building on the work of King and Hustedde, Kesby (2005), and others in the next three chapters we go deeper into these often hidden dimensions of community organizing.

Everyday organizers need to make choices about where they want to perform their work and how they use space and place to achieve their goals. Beyond these choices, their experiences are dramatically influenced by the spaces and places they encounter. Researchers of community organizing would be mistaken to ignore the experiences of organizers inhabiting and moving through the real, physical spaces of homes, town halls, diners, and other public and private places. If we relied only on the writings *about* organizers, we might wrongly imagine that organizers don't have anything to teach us about the spaces and places where democratic power is built. [19]

This is because academics and social theorists often relegate space to geography, planning, and design. Manuals and guidebooks for organizers often marginalize space to the materials checklist. To counter this inattention, this research focuses on the narratives and reflections of organizers themselves. The documentation and analysis of these spoken experiences by the Heating Solutions organizers became a starting point to see how organizers experience space and place and how the spatial dimensions matter to organizing. Even many Heating Solutions organizers I interviewed were surprised when I explained my interest in the spatial dimensions of their experiences. As you will see, the stories and reflections I heard from

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where residents can perform new public identities. Without the spaces to perform and re-perform these new identities, existing configurations of power (along lines of class, race, gender, age, etc…) will continue to exclude these identities from the public realms.
[19] 'Space' is rarely taken seriously in academic and practitioner oriented literature, state-funded and grassroots organizations alike, who explicitly concern themselves with community organizing in the United States.

organizers revealed how the physical landscapes of their communities are filled with hidden treasures and pit falls, obstacles and resources that they often consider and can speak clearly about.

2.7 Listening to stories

Reflecting on this journey reminds me how the primary research questions of how organizers experience space and place, and what we learn from their accounts about the spatial dimensions of community organizing, emerged from my own experience as a community organizer in this particular setting. I was struggling to engage residents in these mobile home parks when I realized how my experiences of space and place were critical to our success as organizers. As my attention shifted toward research, I was motivated to better understand how the community organizers around me were experiencing space and place as well.

At the time I was taking a graduate school course on narrative inquiry where I learned how to use in-depth interviews to elicit stories from organizers about their practices and experiences. While working on the Heating Solutions Project I found that the stories that people told, such as the reports shared between organizers at meetings, or the informal descriptions of neighborhood encounters, were valuable resources that informed the everyday practice of the community organizers around me (Forester 1999). For this reason I was drawn to the narrative approach, as it viewed these first-hand, and autobiographical accounts as compelling, knowledgeable, and contextualized sources for insight into human activities (Ospina & Dodge

2005). Valuing stories as such was consistent with my own experience in the field.

At first it seemed to me that everything that came out of an organizer's mouth was a story. Later I came across story-telling scholar Livia Polanyi's (1985) clear distinction between stories and reports. Reports are the "obligatory chronicles" elicited primarily for purposes to be decided by the recipient such as the parent asking her child what happened at school today. By contrast, stories are full of meaning and significance to the teller. "*Stories are told to make a point, to transmit a message … about the world the teller shares with other people*" (p. 12). I was not interested in stale reports of what a building looked like or the color of ceiling fans. My research aimed to elicit and document meaningful stories and reflections of experiences in particular spaces and places.

One may ask what value the stories of organizers contribute to theoretical discussions or practical actions. Ralph Hummel argues that, "the stories [practitioners] tell are a form of knowledge … suited to developing theories that inform practical action" (Ospina & Dodge 2005; 148). Other scholars who valued the stories of practitioners in their research included Forester's *The Deliberative Practitioner* (1999) that utilized the accounts of mediators, and Peters' (2003, 2006) work on the accounts of cooperative extension staff. From these cases we see the value of research that engages with practitioners with an attitude of respect and mutual learning.

The Deliberative Practitioner is a social inquiry into the practice of mediation and community planning, enlivened with the reflective narratives of professional planners telling stories about their practice. The question of how people relate, deliberate, organize, influence, manipulate, and implement

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was explored through stories of meaning and significance to the planners. Through these types of research I learned how a narrative approach enabled researchers to acknowledge and appreciate the contextualized and practical knowledge embedded within the stories of practitioners.[20] The approach assumed that stories (narrated experiences) convey meaning about something that is happening in the world, while simultaneously acknowledging that they do not convey objective truth. (Peters et al. 2006; 8)

These studies demonstrate how the contextualized knowledge contained in stories of community organizers are valuable to both researchers and practitioners concerned with the effectiveness of social problem solving.[21] The entire Heating Solutions Project could be seen as an experiment in social problem solving. Additionally, the cooperative extension director who brought me into the project was interested in the capacity of this research to help organizers in the future to become more effective.

Through Ospina and Dodge's research and earlier social researchers such as Forester, it became evident that narrative inquiry was a reliable and valid method for documenting and analyzing the stories of organizers to help

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[20] Looking across the social sciences over the last 30 years we can see a rise in emphasis on contextualized, widely accessible, interactive, and practical knowledge. "Ordinary knowledge" from Lindblom & Cohen 1976, "mode-2 knowledge" from Giddons et al. 1994, "*metis*" from Scott 1998, "local knowledge" from Fischer 2000, "indigenous knowledges" from Sefa Dai et al. 2000 and "*phronesis*" from Flyvbjerg 2002. Each of this concepts is distinct, but generally point to forms of knowledge derived from human interactions, outside the governmental and academic realms, should not be overlooked in social inquiry.

[21] In *Usable Knowledge: Social Science and Social Problem Solving* (1976), Lindblom and Cohen describe a broader type of knowledge that encompasses local knowledge. They use the term "ordinary knowledge" to describe "common sense, casual empiricism, or thoughtful speculation or analysis… that does not owe its origin, testing, degree of verification, truth status, or currency to professional social inquiry techniques." (p.12). Lindblom and Cohen go beyond appreciating this concept as a valid form of knowledge and assert that for social problem solving, "people will always depend heavily on ordinary knowledge" (p. 12). Nearly 25 years later Frank Fischer (2000) reasserts the point that, "local knowledge plays an important role in problem identification, definition, and legitimation, not to mention any solutions that may be put forward." (p. 217).

understand the local knowledge that organizers used in social problem solving. Ospina and Dodge focused on social-change leaders, Forester engaged mediators, and Peters worked with extension agents while other social researchers have worked with educators, managers, school parents, farmers, and many other constituencies. With each new inquiry into the narratives of distinct groups came a new social, historical, and spatial context, a unique set of relationships, and a new set of potential research interests.

In the research that emerged from my experience, I built upon the insights of these earlier works to gain a richer understanding of the experiences of community organizers working in particular places through their narratives. Additionally, these narrated experiences and the contextual knowledge within them offered me a starting point to explore the spatial dimensions of community organizing in general. In the end, the approach contributes to both theoretical conversations on community organizing and dialogue on how to improve practice.

2.8 Stories in context

Clearly, my use of a narrative approach was embedded within a broader ethnographic field experience. As a locally respected organizer myself, I had access to local knowledge that was unique to this specific context. [22] This embedded approach helped me to access "meaning in the stories people use, tell, and even live" (Ospina & Dodge 2005; 145) and to engage with a "three

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[22] The naturalistic approach described by Lincoln and Guba (1983) and interpretive approach discussed by Ospina and Dodge (2005) support such a narrative inquiry embedded within a larger ethnographic case study.

dimensional narrative inquiry space…located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social" (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; 63). In this design organizers and community members involved in the Heating Solutions Project were invited in to the research process as people with a perspective and wisdom that was worthy of hearing (Ospina and Dodge 413).

The narratives included in the study that follows were drawn from the final two months of my nearly three-year immersion between February 2003 and December 2006. Throughout the process, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, observation, participant observation, and field journals were employed.[23] During the final six-month period, I focused my participant observations and field notes on interactions with community organizers, residents, researchers, and community development professionals who were working on Heating Solutions Project.

In the final months of my immersion, between October and November of 2006, an intensive narrative collection phase was accomplished. Over a two-month period I interviewed seven other organizers involved in the Heating Solutions Project. Throughout this intensive data collection period I remained actively engaged as an organizer with the other practitioners and residents involved in the Heating Solutions Project. My prolonged engagement with the organizers and community members involved in the project meant frequent interactions and high levels of trust with more than half of the participants in this study. Although I never felt completely "native", and always had a sense

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[23] Qualitative methods are appropriate for this study for they clearly support research questions that focus on meaning, context, and process (Maxwell 2005) and nuance (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

of being an outsider, my time with those particular people in those specific places grounded my approach and this research.

Within the context of this study, our interactions and trust helped to increase the probability that the narratives collected through my interviews and informal conversations were credible. Additionally, the time I spent working with these people in their communities opened my eyes to the intricacies of local relationships and the particular contexts of their work. I am sure that without these lived experiences I would not have understood the situation well enough to design this study. [24]

2.9 Interviewing organizers

After months and years of building relationships and grounding my research, I proceeded to interview seven organizers. There were only 11 or 12 total organizers working on the project, but the organizers I interviewed were purposefully chosen to best represent a diversity of age, class, community of residence, and professional background.[25] Based on my three years of relationship building with other organizers in Tompkins County, I had previous professional relationships with four of the seven participants. Through personal phone calls and emails I arranged to interview each of these

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[24] In chapter 11 of Lincoln and Guba (1985) they discuss issues of credibility, prolonged engagement, going native, and trust within the context of the naturalistic approach to research.

[25] Interview #1 – Nancy, a college student who grew up in a local mobile home park

Interview #2 – Anthony, a recent college graduate who grew up in a upper middle class, rural household

Interview #3 – Gabriella, a middle aged PhD educated professional

Interview #4 – Rachel, a 30 something PhD educated professional

Interview #5 – Cathy, a 40 something PhD educated, but currently unemployed mother

Interview #6 – Mel, a 40 something working class, social service professional

Interview #7 – Andrea, a 50 something working class, artist and educator

organizers. During my interviews with the four organizers in this first round, three other organizers were recommended for participation. I contacted these individuals through email, including an overview of the research and informed consent forms. All of the organizers I contacted agreed to be participants in the study.

As agreed in the consent forms, I have used pseudonyms to provide anonymity for the participants until they have read the final research paper and given consent to use their real names in future publications of the research. Although pseudonyms have been used there remains a strong possibility of exposure due to the high level of professional interaction between the participants and myself outside of this study. This risk was discussed up front with participants. In all cases the participants agreed to proceed, based on my commitment to gain their further consent for the use of any particular sample of their interview in published versions of the research. Secondly, while personal names have changed there has been no attempt to change the names of places and locations. This was done to preserve the relationship between the stories and the spatial context from which they emerged.

Each interview was approximately one and a half hours long and took place in person at locations selected by the interviewee including their own homes, the county library, and their offices. Digital tape recording was used to ensure the reliability of the narrative texts to be studied (Seidman 1998; 97). In preparation for the interviews I followed the narrative approach of Forester (1999) and Peters et al. (2006) that seeks to draw out detailed "practice stories" of community organizers.

To guide the interview a series of open-ended interview questions were developed. The focus of the questions was inspired by Werlen's (1993) proposal for action-oriented geography. Werlen proposed that research on the interface of spatial and sociological phenomena should examine at least three dimensions of the spatial embedded-ness, the physical, the subjective, and the socio-cultural dimensions of any given phenomena. For the study I developed questions around each dimension. For example:

1. **Physical Dimension:** Where does the work of the Heating Solutions Project get done? Where do you hold planning meetings? Where does your outreach engage community members? What are those places like?

2. **Subjective Dimension:** What do you hope will come out of this project? How do you feel in these places? What is like to organize from these places?

3. **Socio-Cultural Dimension**: What significance do these places have for you and the community members?

Uncertain from the start that anyone else in the Heating Solutions Project was thinking about space and place, I was not surprised when most of the organizers I interviewed rarely spoke explicitly about the spatial dimension of their work without my probing questions.[26] Initially they spoke of their work to build local capacities as "bringing people together around an

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[26] Seidman (1998) and Rubin & Rubin (2005) both explore the balance between asking open-ended questions and probing into areas that the researcher wants to learn about. Seidman explains that he is uncomfortable with the invasive connotation of "probe" and prefers "explore."

issue" and "building social networks". One organizer admitted she "never really thought about it [space] in terms of its ability to impact our connection with people when we go out in the community." These responses were familiar to me. In addition to my own experiences I described earlier, I have found that 'relationship building' is a common strategy in both politically progressive styles of organizing such as the Industrial Areas Foundation[27] and state sponsored organizing such as practiced by the Cooperative Extension branches around the country.[28]

Based on my recent experience as an organizer, I was willing to bet that behind the organizers' preference for discussing 'relationships' was a practice grounded in space and place. I developed a hunch that if I asked for details about specific locations, settings, and situations the organizers would reveal how space and place mattered. So I followed a hunch. I just needed to scratch beneath the surface. I imagined that other organizers were not accustomed to questions about space and place.

In order to elicit stories and not artificially limit my interviews to "spatial" topics, I would begin my interviews with open-ended questions that begged story telling such as "How is life in this community? How did you get involved in the Heating Solutions Project? How will the Heating Solutions Project help?" Only after the interviewees were in the midst of telling stories in response to these open-ended questions did I begin to ask for more details. I began to ask for details about the actual places and spaces where they were

[27] See Warren (2001) and Chambers (2006) for detailed overviews of the refined organizing techniques that build off the foundation of solid relationships
[28] See the recent Visioning Notebook published for Extension agents by the Community and Rural Development Institute (2005) that provides a comprehensive overview of organizing models, and intervention practices that seek to strengthen the capacities of rural communities and facilitate social change toward sustainable community.

doing their work and their personal experiences of these spaces and places.
The organizers would often struggle with these questions. Apparently, my
stated interest in the spatial dimensions of community organizing described in
all my emails and forms had not fully prepared them to discuss this aspect of
their work.

Even after asking them explicit questions about space and place they
would proceed to tell me how important it was to get the right residents to the
planning table. What planning table? Where? What was it like being there?
How are those places important? These seemed to be the details they would
have left out. But in each case, in response to probing questions, the organizers
eventually began to answer the 'where' questions.[29] In fact as I looked back on
the seven interviews they each spoke about space and place and their own
spatially-situated experiences with more detail and nuance then I could have
predicted. These were not simply reports, but stories about the spatially
situated experiences of these community organizers.

2.10 Analyzing

Following the interviews I reviewed the tapes while writing analytic memos
and contact summaries. Eventually I hired a reputable and discrete
professional to fully transcribe the interviews.[30] The original transcriptions
included all words, utterances, and pauses captured on the digital recordings.

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[29] Rubin & Rubin (2005) discuss the value of probing for detail in this way, "elaboration probes ask for more detail or explanation of a particular concept or theme that you [the interviewer] selected from what the interviewee has said." (p. 165)
[30] Seidman (1998; 56-57) has a section on anonymity where he describes the importance of reputable and discrete transcribers who are familiar with the issues of privacy at stake.

Additionally, to ensure accuracy of the interview content, I ran respondent validations to confirm accuracy with each interviewee. After each transcription was completed, I reviewed the full text to identify any discrete stories about their experiences as a community organizer, personal histories, explicit short term and long-term goals for their community organizing work, and reflections on specific issues relating to space and place.

Next the interviews were edited into practice stories and shorter reflections on specific themes that highlighted a variety of personal histories and professional practices. The stories and reflections I encountered were edited for clarity and readability. They were edited to help tell us the stories of the organizer's personal histories in the community, their broad goals as an organizer, their goals for the Heating Solutions Project, and detailed stories of their work on the project. While editing these segments I removed nearly all syntax, utterances, pauses, stumbling speech, repetitions that did not signify increased importance, and other elements that did not increase the clarity of the story.[31] Throughout this thesis the stories that emerged are presented in single space italics.

These practice stories were then viewed alongside my documented field experiences.[32] Both were analyzed for information on where organizers do their work and the types and qualities of experiences in those specific

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[31] The edited practice stories and thematic reflections generated from the interviews allowed me to "present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time, all central components of qualitative analysis." Additionally a profile or "vignette of a participant's experience is an effective way of …opening up interview material to analysis and interpretation." (Seidman 1998; 102)

[32] Ethnographic documentation included a personal journal that chronicled my organizing efforts detailing personal interactions, rich descriptions of spaces and places, personal goals, and project documents that were available to all Heating Solutions organizers, email correspondences with Heating Solutions organizers and participating residents, and recordings and notes of planning meetings.

spaces and places. The analytic goal was to identify prominent themes that were encountered and described by at least 3 organizers. I hoped to show how "the places in which they [the research participants] live and work, their classrooms, their schools…their communities…their institutions…their landscapes in the broadest sense, are in the midst of stories" (Ospina and Dodge 2005; 64). The research as presented here shares these rich, varied, and embodied stories of meaningful human experiences taking place in particular places.

As I saw it, the stories and reflections I documented were meant to reveal multiple windows into the complex practice of community organizing. These narratives are examples of meaningful experiences from a small sample of organizers in a particular community. In *Making Social Science Matter* (2001), Flyvbjerg reminds us of the "power of example" to help scholars, practitioners, and the public at large to reflect on their lives, values, and everyday actions (p 64.). Flyvbjerg's work on phronesis, or "practical wisdom" offers a compelling alternative for social research as scholars continue to move away from objective, predictive capital "T" truths, and toward the illumination of multiple, dynamic small "t" truths about the human condition (p. 57). This study provides an exploration of multiple stories, themes, and theoretical notions that enhance our ability for self-reflection on topics relevant to modern life. It does not attempt to capture the entire complexity of community organizing.

Similar to *Habits of the Heart*, the acclaimed work of "social science as public philosophy", throughout this research I attempt to "get close to the people and phenomena…focus on the minutiae and practices…make extensive use of case studies in context… use narrative as expository

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technique… [be] dialogical, that is, it allows for other voices than those of the authors" (Flyvbjerg 2001; 63). In this tradition the thorough presentation and consideration of stories by organizers in the next chapter are not irrefutable evidence. Instead the following chapters are a meaningful conversation between multiple voices that can "hold up a mirror to society thus encouraging and facilitating reflexivity" (p. 64).

Do not mistake the mirror for an unbiased portrayal of Truth (notice the capital "T"). While this research presents a wide variety of perspectives and experiences, my own ethnographic experience as a community organizer and graduate student acts as a common thread that ties the study together. In this sense, the stories of the organizers interviewed for this research are retold and recast in the light and shadows of my own life story. For this reason I have presented my own life, exposing my own biases and missteps, before we dive into the lives of others. Look, listen, and consider the value for yourself.

Chapter Three: Experiences of Planning and Outreach

3.1 Introduction

Often space and place are overlooked in writings on community organizing. Scholars and practitioner-oriented writers have done a much better job at considering relationships, communication, history, economics, power, etc ... Through the narrated accounts of Heating Solutions organizers presented in this chapter, we also begin to see how these well-theorized dimensions interact with the personal histories of the organizers, their emotional experiences, their own choices and strategies, power differences, and the spaces and places where organizing takes shape. In this sense, the narratives of organizers help us situate the work of community organizing in a fuller, multi-dimensional context.[1] Without such a serious consideration of how organizing is situated we lose sight of the ground we all walk on and how it feels under our feet.

In each neighborhood setting, in each new place, with each new web of relationships, the Heating Solutions Project appears to have played out differently. In townships across Tompkins County, groups of concerned residents and local leaders planned and implemented their own localized

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[1] In *A Neighborhood Organizer's Handbook* (1977) Warren and Warren provide a comprehensive, ethnographic "how-to" approach to community organizing. In a chapter on "How to Diagnose a Neighborhood" they describe a variety of techniques for "familiarizing yourself with the area." At least one short section focuses on the "gathering places" within a neighborhood. They suggest that organizers identify "potential [and] observed" gathering places as well as the "diversity of [and] competition between gathering places" (p. 195). Few other writings on community organizing place even this much emphasis on the places where people come together.

strategy of the Heating Solutions Project. Much of the work at this stage was either planning meetings or public outreach. Individuals with different experience levels stepped into roles as community organizers to mobilize their neighbors and friends. These efforts carried them into a variety of everyday settings, the local spatial context for their practice.

The accounts of the community organizers who coordinated these local activities are the focus of the following chapter. Their practice stories and reflections focus our attention on how organizers, each with unique personal histories and relationships, experience the particular spaces and places of their community. While the chapter is filled with the words of the organizers, the stories are considered for the themes and patterns that emerge. These themes are briefly discussed at the end of each section. In conclusion the chapter summarizes the prominent themes that we encounter.

Part One: Planning

3.2 The spaces and places of planning

Through my direct experience as a Heating Solutions organizer, combined with all of the formal interviews I collected and the hundreds of informal conversations with involved individuals, I found that planning meetings were a common strategy for moving the project forward. The planning meetings I participated in personally were managed events created by professional and volunteer organizers for residents, community leaders, and other organizers to come together, share experiences, dialogue, develop agendas, plan out their next steps, and carry out many other important activities as a group.

One can hardly imagine effective community organizing without such meetings. In fact, a countywide consortium of human services leaders started the Heating Solutions Project. This consortium met regularly for planning meetings in the conference rooms at the county Cooperative Extension. Through these regular planning meetings they initiated, and later monitored, the first year of community level activities. Although initiated and monitored by professionals from these office spaces the project had an impact on Tompkins County through the volunteer efforts of staff from local agencies, unpaid community organizers, and active citizens in townships and neighborhoods around the county.[2]

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2 The first year of planning meetings are described and analyzed in my earlier unpublished paper, *Stories of Working Together: A Narrative Inquiry of Collaborative Social Problem Solving* (Roth 2006), based on an in-depth interview with one of the Consortium participants.

3.3 Planning in formal spaces

Through the narratives of volunteer Heating Solutions organizers I heard how many of the first planning meetings across several of the project sites were in business offices, town halls, and courtrooms. The organizers themselves often described these physical settings as relatively formal. These various sites were spread across several townships in Tompkins County. They included offices in the 'ivory towers' of Cornell University, conference rooms in non-profits that serve low-income families, the manager's office of a mobile home park, community centers in poor rural townships, and courtrooms in more affluent areas.

These formal venues were used by groups of residents and community leaders who community organizers had brought together to work on local energy issues. In some cases the office spaces were used for smaller planning meetings while the town halls, and courthouses were used as larger, more public, venues. The stories and reflections these organizers shared speak about the locations of the meetings and many details of their personal experiences in these settings. You may begin to hear how their experiences of everyday places are far more complex and nuanced then you might have imagined.

3.4 Nancy and the manager's office

First we turn to Nancy. She was an organizer who I worked with closely over several months to engage youth and adults from several mobile home parks in the Heating Solutions Project. Early in my involvement as a Heating Solutions

organizer, when I first began to identify people who had connections to low-income families in two of the local mobile home parks, the director of the county extension office told me that I should reach out to a college student named Nancy. He explained that Nancy had grown up in the smaller of the two parks. She now ran a successful youth empowerment organization in the park. Only after working with Nancy for 6 months did I hear more about her long relationship with the community where she now organized. For her interview Nancy met me in a study room of the college library. We squeezed a nighttime interview between her studying time and volleyball practice. She shared this reflection about growing up:

> *I grew up in [the Congers Mobile Home Park] since I was the age of four. I moved out in early high school around the age of fourteen. During those ten years of growing up there I got to experience a lot of what it's like to be in a confined space, a place that people quite frequently looked down upon. It's not really the home you ever dream of having or letting other people know where you live. Energy wise they're not really built with great insulation. I remember while growing up the heating systems were terrible. We'd be very cold. I'd be hunched over the heating vent a lot of the times in the morning trying to get warm. Also the water pressure there would be bad and it was never a home that you had much pride in. I always dreamt of moving to a nice house. When I was 14 I finally got to move. That was the best thing ever.*
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> *It's different now in Congers then it was when I was there. There were a lot of woods around that I would go to. There are still a few woods left but most of them are down the street. A lot of kids probably aren't allowed to get to those. It's all private property and they don't allow anyone on there. The other*

woods got torn down for development. [But as a kid] I didn't feel confined once I got out there [to the woods.] That was my refuge. That's where I always went to enjoy playing in the creeks and the woods and building forts. I was really into building forts. Having a space of my own that I was really proud of. That's probably what led me to my interior design field, being able to control my environment and being able to design something that I'm proud of being in.

Today Nancy studies design and environmental analysis at Cornell University, ten minutes from the mobile home park she spent the first half of her life. While in college she has become a student leader and community organizer. In our introductory phone conversation Nancy told me about the youth empowerment organization that she founded as a college student to serve the youth of the mobile home park were she had lived for 10 years. She repeated the description of the program in our in-depth interview months later:

I started this [program] about two years ago. It's called the Ours Program. The "O" stands for opportunity. I wanted to give the kids there an opportunity to do things that they wouldn't be able to do because either their parents didn't have the money or didn't have the time, or they didn't have the transportation. So we bring opportunities to them. We do activities and learn a lot of the things that they never would learn. The "U" is for understanding. If they understand themselves they understand others.

We do a lot of teamwork- oriented activities, not just homework. We talk about what are the things that they like to do, what they don't like to do,

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how they make decisions that are better for them, and who they really are.
That's what we're doing a lot more with the older kids especially through a
youth council [where they help run the program]. Respect is the "R". We teach
them respect for themselves and try to keep them away from drugs and bad peer
pressure. And respect for others. We feel that by providing these opportunities,
by teaching them how to understand themselves and others and by teaching
them about respect, they're going to follow that road to success.

Months later after Nancy and I had worked together on the Heating
Solutions Project she reflected on how she first got involved and her hopes for
the project:

[The OURS program] works with the County Cooperative Extension. I just
ran into him [the extension director] and he mentioned this [Heating
Solutions] project and he pitched it really well. Whenever I run into him we
chat about whatever. He hooks me into new projects all the time. First of all he
knows I am into environmental issues. As a designer I don't only care about
designing something that looks good or that is glamorous or sells a product,
I'm into creating a space that's going to be mutually beneficial for both the
environment and the people within it.

He pitched the Heating Solutions Project as a way to get the mobile
home park community involved in the environment. Maybe there would also
be a way to get the kids involved. But not just for kids. The project could help
people in the situation I was in. When I first heard him it grabbed me but I was
like, "I don't have time, this is going to be really tough to fit in." That's why
the link to the [OURS] program made it a feasible plan to get involved.

I really hope that the Heating Solutions Project is successful at reaching everybody in the park and that it's not just a one- time deal. People move in and out and there is more follow up that needs to occur in the process. I mean educating is difficult and many times residents are too busy to listen and they just assume you're trying to sell something. First of all I hope that through the Heating Solutions Project, people in the community are getting more connected and actually communicating with each other more. But we also had talked about the possibility of having [energy efficiency] products given away to residents. They can try these things out and really see firsthand what could be if they want to make that effort.

I would like to see them actually take on some of these [efficiency measures], save money, and recognize that they have that ability to control their environment even though it seems pretty hopeless to them at times. And very rarely do they take pride in that. Very rarely do they do anything about their living situation. So I'd like to see for sure some of those products showing up in their homes and [residents] really recognizing what they have the potential for.

For several months after our introduction, Nancy and I worked together to build relationships with families living in the local mobile home park where her program was based. Our efforts were moving very slowly toward any ability to mobilize the community around energy issues. Most of the families Nancy knew were already overloaded and stretched thin. In addition, the park's manager was not supportive of new efforts to mobilize the residents. Through our contacts at a local social service organization, we heard that the manager of another nearby Mobile Home Park would be more

supportive. In an attempt to keep the project moving we attempted to organize a half-day event for kids at this other mobile home park.

This second community was only 10 minutes from where Nancy grew up. In my conversations with Nancy we envisioned a 'Youth Fun Day' as a strategy to engage residents in an event focused on energy issues that was both fun and informative. Over several phone calls to this new park manager I explained the Heating Solutions effort, and the idea of a youth event with information for parents. He invited Nancy, another Cornell researcher, and myself to come to his office trailer for a planning meeting. The meeting would be our first visit to this specific mobile home park. Months later when I interviewed Nancy she reflected on that planning meeting in ways that I was completely unaware of while in the meeting myself.

> *[The manager has] a pretty good-sized desk. There was a great distance between us. It wasn't cold and completely unwelcoming. He seems to be very receptive to change and willing to explore an idea. He is a very open minded person… In talking he just comes off as a bit intimidating…He was in his own spot and we were all out here [on the other side of the desk]. So that was definitely [a] formal feeling to me. The fact that this was such a distance you know. It kind of made me feel detached for a while from actually being a part of the discussion. I did speak and I did explain what I was doing, but it's kind of like he's up on this throne and I'm down here. Because he is at that distance and he has that big desk in front of him. There is a barrier. That's occurring due to the obvious relationship [that] he's the boss.*

We had had walked into a space that was rich with meaning. Nancy's reflection invites us into her experience of this particular planning space. For Nancy the arrangement of the office suggested who was the "boss", "up on his thrown" and who was "down here". Although she experienced such "barriers" this planning meeting was in many ways a practical success. As a participant in the meeting myself, I know that the manager eventually gave his full support for the initiative and offered resources to the project. In part two on outreach we will return to Nancy's stories and reflections about the success of the Youth Fun Day. Although Nancy's personal story raises several particularly rich topics such as a personal experience in confined spaces, a love of making forts as a child, studies in designing spaces for others, and a dramatic experience of power differences in the managers office we will look to another organizer's experience before going deeper into Nancy's narrative.

3.5 Anthony and the town hall

In another township within Tompkins County I met another young organizer who, like Nancy, grew up in the community where he now organizes. He also attended Cornell University. Similar to Nancy, Anthony's narrative reveals the complex ways that his identity is intertwined with the community were he was raised.

> *I was born at the hospital and went to the elementary school [in Caroline] and all the way through Dewitt middle school and Ithaca high school. The only time I did not live in Tompkins County was when I was in Rochester for a few*

years going to school but then I transferred back to Cornell. My parents have

always lived in Caroline. I am definitely a local. But it does depend on who's

asking me. When I was in Rochester and people asked, "Where you're from?" I

said "Ithaca." If I'm in Ithaca and people say, "Where are you from?" I'm

from Caroline. When people from Cornell ask me where I'm from then it gets

complicated because I don't know whether I should say, "Well I'm from the

area." If I'm talking to a Cornell student I usually just say, "I'm a local." But

since I'm now on the [Caroline town] council I've regained my identification

with Caroline.

Anthony was raised by parents who were academics affiliated with the local university. Anthony comes from a distinctly different socio-economic background then Nancy. I first met Anthony several years before in a university course on Community Education. Over time we became friends and I watched as he engaged in college activism. After graduating Anthony was interested in making an impact in his hometown. Through diligence, hard work, and some luck Anthony was voted onto his town's board. At 22 years old he became one of the youngest elected official in the county. He was a very busy young leader, and I was not surprised that he eventually became a Heating Solutions organizer. Anthony was in fact the first organizer I interviewed and was excited to participate. He spoke to me in a small reading room at the County Library about how his involvement began.

The most salient meeting in my mind must have been in downtown [Ithaca].

[The director of Cooperative Extension and I] were at a meeting together and

we were walking back to our cars. It might have been at the mayor's

roundtable. I was asking him what he was up to and he was telling me about a project that he was working on for heating solutions. He was talking about it and I don't remember much out of that conversation except that I was inspired. He is an inspirational kind of guy. I just remember that I was captivated by the idea.

Several months later I told him that I was really interested in the [Heating Solutions] project. I was looking for a job and I was doing some networking. The Heating Solutions Project was one of the things I really wanted to pursue because it was something that I could help with. Eventually, he approached me about it and asked, "Would you be interested in this?" I definitely said yes. Then I had a meeting with him at Cooperative Extension where he laid everything out. That was one of the most inspiring meetings I ever had.

He was totally sold on the idea, and I was learning more about the back-end theoretical ideas of how network creation and community building will help in the future, and the long term benefits of doing this kind of community process. I was just really excited. Before that meeting I was still courting the idea of being the countywide coordinator for this thing. Originally he had invited me to work on this at the countywide level. The key thing was getting back to him on my availability, whether I'd be able to do the work. In the meantime he invited me to the Heating Solutions planning council. That was really interesting.

I don't remember when this was in relationship to my election to the Caroline council, whether I was running at that point in time. But I was increasingly becoming a public figure, someone who people started to recognize. At the Heating Solutions planning council there were lots of heads

of departments and I remember thinking, "Wow these are all people who can make things move in their own organizations." I thought that was very interesting. The Heating Solutions Project had people around the table that can make decisions. I even presented a little bit on where Caroline was in the process. At that point we couldn't decide if it made sense for me to run the countywide effort. Ken said, "Why don't you try to get it started in Caroline and then see what happens." So, I've always had that in the back of mind. We are going to do this in Caroline.

Although a "planning council" of organizational leaders developed the project, Anthony had a particular way of articulating the value of the Heating Solutions Project for Caroline.

I think that [energy efficiency and conservation] are really important on a community scale. If you get an entire community to do energy conservation, you're going to cut your carbon emissions and have a whole host of global benefit. I really like that it helps individual people, individual homeowners, residents, and renters cut their utility bills. I've always thought that to do sustainability there are three areas to consider. You have to have your environment, your social justice, and your economic things all together. That's something I think this [Heating Solutions] project excels in doing.

When people are doing it they are not really thinking about the environmental impact, they're thinking "wow this guys is going to save me $300 on my heating bill." For people out in Caroline that's a social justice issue because they're spending a higher and higher proportion of their income on energy costs. And especially for the people that are in dilapidated housing,

that are in rural areas, they may not have access to information on how to get

their home weatherized and everything. It's for those poorer, rural residents

that it's most important.

The project is helping the environment and it's helping our neediest

people. Those are the people that will benefit from it the most. And it builds

community. You're building networks that can then be used later on. You're

doing a [door-to-door] survey [to identify the energy situation of local

residents] and you find somebody [who is interested in the project.] And you

ask them "Hey you're pretty enthusiastic about this, can you finish off a block

here? Can you do 10 more [houses]?" I really like the idea of neighbors getting

to know neighbors through this.

Anthony describes how the Heating Solutions Project can positively impact his community through a strategy of grassroots engagement. Rural poverty is on his mind as well as environmental protection. Short-term results such as lower energy costs combine with large-scale reductions in pollution. Additionally the project has the potential to bring people together, and build social networks. In the next section we hear how the Heating Solutions Project itself is embedded within a history of other community organizing efforts in Caroline. Anthony tells of how a small group of concerned citizens and local elected officials began to take action several years ago on energy issues:

I think it was 2004, that two board members [from Caroline] wanted to

purchase wind energy for all the town's municipal energy needs and they did.

The next step [a year or two later] was they formed Energy Independent

Caroline. They said "Okay let's get people together about the idea of putting up

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wind turbines." They had done some quick research and figured out this might be financially feasible and the town could actually make a profit. A group of people came together about that.

I only started coming to the meetings in January when the group started to form. It was just these same two town board members saying "let's call up the people who had donated the $1400 to get the wind energy purchased for the town and let's see if we can get some interest in getting this group together." They sent out letters in November or December saying, "We're going to meet at this time." At that point I started to be in the loop because of my position on the town council. So people got together.

People were really excited. At the next meeting two people volunteered to be the group's co-chairs. These were people new to the community. They had just arrived in the fall. I remember meeting them as they came in. They were overwhelmed and at the same time really excited to have found this group.

Only after the early success of purchasing wind power for the town, and a small group of citizens had coalesced around the topic, did Anthony introduce the Heating Solutions Project. Although Anthony was excited about the many benefits of the project for building social networks, reducing the cost of living for rural poor, and reducing pollution he was also aware of the benefits for this new community group. But his story left me wondering where people got together to make this all happen.

I was interested in getting this new group [Energy Independent Caroline] to do the [Heating Solutions] project as a first step for many reasons. [The Heating Solutions Project] would be good for this group because it would build

relationship with community to see Energy Independent Caroline as providing something good [for the community] like handing out free [energy efficient] light bulbs donated from Wal-Mart. Building a rapport with the community will help the group in the long term. That's one of the reasons I was advocating to do the Heating Solutions Project. One of the other group founders and myself advocated, "hey let's do this Heating Solutions Project."

I invited [one of the county human service leaders] to present to the group. The meeting was interesting with lots of questions. A couple of people had already heard the presentation several times. They were definitely sold on the idea. A couple of the other people didn't really know much about it and were learning it for the first time. It was just sinking in. I seem to remember people were like, "Yeah that's cool" but the immediate reaction was not, "Let's do this."

After the initial meeting, Anthony committed to leading the Caroline Heating Solutions Project. The other members of Energy Independent Caroline were fully supportive. I asked Anthony to speak about the planning meetings of Energy Independent Caroline. He explained that most of the early meetings when the group first considered the Heating Solutions Project occurred in the Caroline town hall. Until I asked very directly about where these meeting took place, his story lacked any details about the spatial dimension of his work. Once he understood the direction of my questions, a whole new door opened for him to describe the planning spaces and places of Energy Independent Caroline. First he shared his ideas about what types of settings were appropriate.

It's important to have [meetings in] a publicly accessible space. Since we are a public group, we are open to people coming. Having a venue that everybody knows is important. If you have regular meetings where you're informing people and making decisions that is better for more official public type spaces.

Apparently, Anthony had some practical knowledge about what kind of spaces worked for their purposes of inviting the public into their project. More was revealed as he talked about the actual Caroline Town Hall where they often held planning meetings.

The Town Hall is an interesting space. It's an old schoolhouse. It used to be the schoolhouse in Caroline. It's missing its belfry now. It was just placed on the historic registry for those sorts of places. It has a kind of ugly orange carpet [and] very harsh fluorescent lights. It's also a courtroom so it feels very formal in a way, but in a Caroline sort of way because we don't have any space. There are file cabinets out and there are shelves and boxes of papers around. Chairs are set up in the back.

Where you come in, 3 rows of chairs are set up as an audience for when board meetings happen. In the front there's the table. There's a big huge long, big heavy wooden table. It's huge and that's where everyone sits around in these ugly green upholstered chairs that are 50's or 60's style. In the very front there's the flag and the podium and the judge's thing is all set up. It's an interesting building to have a meeting in. I can imagine why residents are intimidated by the Town Hall. It's not like the county legislator's chambers or anything like that. It's not overly formal and nice, the chairs are naked and the ceiling fans are really dirty.

If you look around the walls there are pictures. They recently did
historical pictures. Upstairs is where the history room is. There are pictures of
the original schoolhouse when it had the spire and everything. The entire
community came out and took a big picture in the 1800's or something. They
did that a couple times so you can get a sense if you're looking around that
there's a lot of history here. There are also a couple of plaques and awards on
the walls. It has a kind of shared feel to it, once you kind of get over the initial
official feeling of it all. But I don't even know if I'm describing that right.

Although Anthony is reflecting on the work of Energy Independent
Caroline and the early planning meetings for the Heating Solutions Project he
focuses on other uses of the Town Hall. Anthony is also the youngest member
of the Town Board. As a member of the Town Board, Anthony is familiar with
the Town Hall as an official space. This is where elected representatives make
decisions that directly affect the lives of local residents. In this next reflection
we learn how Anthony's experiences of the Town Hall relate to his distinct
roles as a member of the Town Board and the Energy Independent Caroline
group. In the Caroline Town Hall his two roles come face to face.

I think about how the space was arranged. People from the community are
sitting in the audience and here we [the local elected officials] are sitting
around the power table. It was the table of authority. People that sit around
this table can make decisions that affect people and that is something that I
think about. I'm in the same group with them but at this moment we're acting
as if they are separate from us. That is interesting. Another organizer formally
presented what our group [Energy Independent Caroline] is doing and why we

would like to be a committee of the town. Everyone on the council already knows what the group is about and 2 of the members, Frank and I, had gone to pretty much every meeting. We had an intimate knowledge of the group. It was an interesting dynamic. It was a little bit awkward.

When I'm sitting around the council table, it feels very much like the people on the other side of the table, even though I have a sense of affiliation with them, are really far away on the other side of the table. I think about, what would it be like, if we just had a round table. Or better yet, what would it be like if we just had a circle of chairs. [It would] completely change how we're interacting with each other. At the power table you feel like you are far away from some of the people. It also makes it seem a little bit more official and it's funny because I remember [another local organizer] trying to lead the [Energy Independent Caroline] meeting once at the town hall. He was very deliberative. He was almost role-playing that we were sitting around an official meeting table and meeting space, it's (pounding on table), and it's hard to do anything.

It's the authority table and it kind of makes me upset. A little bit. We're sitting around this table, we're human beings and it frustrates me that my project partner is sitting in the rows there. I was wondering what she was thinking. How did she see the power dynamics? We are sitting at the power table. Now that's not fair. That's not equal. It's not an equal setup and it feels weird for me. I have been thinking about it lately, how people are treated and afraid of authority. No wonder they're afraid of authority. They sit around a table where you're not part of the discussion.

I mean we [the Town Board] make an effort if we're having a discussion to invite them to sit around the table. I've actually experienced this because I was an intern and I would sit in the audience. Once I was asked to

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come to the table it leveled the playing field. It was fascinating. It happened (snapping his fingers) just like that. Previously I was separate from them. They were a committee in that they had boundaries and you cannot affect it. Once they asked me to sit at the table, it immediately changed to 'we are all people just sitting around a table' but for people who have not yet sat around the table, it's very off-putting. Even for me, I had the intense feeling that I'm not a part of that. They're separate.

With more depth then Nancy's reflections, Anthony's account illustrates how complex an organizer's relationship to a planning space can be. Space and place seem to have some affect on his emotional and felt experiences. Is this personal experience significant to the work at hand? Does it have practical importance? Again we hear of a connection between power and the arrangements of the table and chairs. We may begin to wonder if "being on the same level" with other participants in a meeting really matters. In addition, his story brings particular attention to physical settings that have multiple purposes.

In big cities and small towns alike, spaces and places in the community have multiple purposes characterized by a range of activities. A space may be a gym for basketball one afternoon, and the site of a PTA meeting later that night. A parent may be cheering for their daughter earlier that day on the court, and hours later they step into the same space to find parents and teachers arguing over a bond issue.

3.6 Andrea and the village hall

The third narrative comes from a community organizer in the township of Freeville. In Freeville an organizer named Andrea brought people together for a planning meeting in an underutilized village hall. Unlike Anthony and Nancy, Andrea was a middle aged, seasoned community organizer. I was introduced to Andrea years before when I first began to get involved in local community organizing. We worked together on various social change projects. Over this time Andrea and I developed a respectful and friendly relationship. Although we both were involved with the Heating Solutions Project we never spoke about the project until I contacted her for a one-on-one interview. She invited me to drive out to her farmhouse around brunch-time for the interview. She made me an omelet from fresh eggs and tea from her own peppermint. As I ate she began to tell me some of her personal history that I had never heard before.

> *We moved here in 1974. My birth daughter was two. I was living collectively with my sister and her husband. We were pretty well known around here because we were the hippies and there were seven adults and a child living together in this house. Freeville hadn't seen anything like that before. Mostly these families are pretty conservative, republican, practicing Christians, rural for generations with farms passed down in the family. But they didn't bug us. We bought wood from the farmer down there. He brought it up with his horses in a big wagon and we unloaded it together. We had goats at the beginning.*

We asked local people to help. We asked questions of people. We're not really deeply integrated into the community. We don't belong to the church, which is where most everyone has his or her connections to the community. Pretty much people here think of the church as the community. That's how the community gathers. The food bank goes through the church, the clothing give away goes through the church, the spring fair, the fall harvest festival, all the town's things, all the things that the community does together, go through the church. So we're not woven in there because I'm not a Christian and I will not be one. But they're pretty okay with us.

Most of the rest of the people that I bought the house with eventually left and meanwhile I had come out as a lesbian so then the neighbors had a whole other thing to get used to. We weren't just hippies, we were queers too. And so they had a whole other hurdle to get over. And to their credit we haven't had any harassment and it's been years now. In fact in '94 when my partner's son was killed in a car crash, the community totally rallied. They brought food to us. Somebody dug the grave out there for free. People were just really supportive.

It's interesting being accepted but not be woven in, being acknowledged and part of the community but not really social. I contribute to the clothing drives. We work at the food pantry every other Monday. I go to the fall harvest festival and the spring fair and I say hi to people and hang out and chat. We find as many ways as we can. When we have extra zucchini or when I can extra tomatoes we pass them out, or when there's a big birthday cake and my son wants to share it with the neighbors we take it over. One year our kids baked heart shaped cookies for Valentines Day and we took them around to all the neighbors. And so we're in but we're not in.

I listened intently to Andrea's story of how she creatively and respectfully wove her family into a culturally conservative rural community. I was amazed at how place and identity intertwined. After hearing about her personal story, I asked about her recent organizing efforts around energy issues in the community. Similar to the Energy Independent Caroline effort, Andrea was involved in these issues before she worked with the Heating Solutions Project. I learned how her agenda was indeed much broader then energy efficiency.

> *It was just after Hurricane Katrina that I started to be concerned about energy. I started to realize, okay global warming, okay peak-oil, you know things are going to fall apart pretty severely. And we don't know when. I could see with Katrina that when things fall apart the government is not the solution. When things fall apart people help each other. If we had networks, if we knew each other, it would be easier. So I decided to start building some networks in Freeville that were stronger than the loose connections that I had and that weren't based on the church.*
>
> *When little things start to grow, they're like little tiny tender shoots coming up out of the earth. You have to really respect them and protect them because the tiniest little kick with your boot will knock that growth tip off and it's not going to grow anymore. What we really want to grow is citizen engagement. But we are in such isolation, as a society, that citizen engagement is a tender, vulnerable little creature. We really have to protect it and nurture it and think about that primarily. We have to think about what can help that grow, what will strengthen that.*

Andrea describes her bigger goal of nurturing citizen engagement. The current energy crisis is a practical and urgent issue that people can wrap their hands around with the possibility of creating lasting networks. Andrea then began to speak about how she saw the value of the Heating Solutions Project and what led to her involvement. Unlike other interviews, I was surprised at how naturally her narrative included the spaces where her work took place.

First I found out who the Mayor was. I had never met her. I called her up and said, "I want to meet with you." I told her the project I wanted to do was connecting people to each other. Let's use like how expensive gas is and how expensive heating oil is and use that as the excuse to get people talking to each other." And I told her my bigger goal was to get this village connected to itself. She thought it was a great idea. She said if you don't talk politics and you just talk real issues people are pretty much lined up with each other.

Our efforts were not part of the Heating Solutions Project but they fed directly into it. That was why I got engaged with Heating Solutions. The Mayor and I identified a couple of other key people in town that we thought we could talk with. She went after a few people and I went after a few people and we started to get some people interested. And eventually the director of Cooperative Extension got wind of what we were doing.

I called the Mayor and we met at the Village Hall. There's a little tiny building that has an office in there where the records are kept and sometimes they have meetings in there and the maps are in there and it's a pretty cold, sterile kind of place. And most of the time it's locked up and nobody's there. A few hours a week a clerk is in there. The mayor and I met there and then

sometimes we met at the diner. The diner is now closed but sometimes we met there.

The Cooperative Extension director came to a meeting at the Village Hall. He presented the project to the mayor, Susan, and me. Susan delivers mail in Freeville. We thought she would be a good person because she knows everybody. The director met with us and said, "I have this energy survey. Let's do this." And we said, "Okay, that sounds like a good plan, that sounds like a good way to talk to people." It's a way to get in the door and it's something concrete. He explained to us what the whole [Heating Solutions] program was about and we adopted it.

Andrea caught my attention when she began to speak about the meetings in the "cold, sterile" village hall. I asked her to tell me more about that place where she brought the small planning team together. The richness of her detailed descriptions brings us into her experience of a place that is valuable for community organizing in Freeville.

The Village Hall was a comfortable place to meet because it was no mans land. It's a public building. It's a civic building so it belongs to everybody. And that's cool. I mean you don't have to be a member. You're just a citizen. That was really valuable and if I were going to start something up or have meetings, I'd want to go back to that [space]. It's a low building. On the outside, it's kind of like a dentist's office. It's got a minimum amount of landscaping out front. You walk up two steps and you're in this big open room.

There's a little desk on one side where the clerk sits. It's not very well lit, and there's a great big table in the middle with chairs all around and then there are a couple of other little offices in the back and there's a bathroom. The table and the chairs are mismatched plastic and metal chairs around two of those big folding tables. There are file cabinets, and maps, emergency numbers and useful information on the walls. But everything is a little old. It's been there for a while. It's not a really active place where a lot of people gather and things are happening. It's pretty much shut down most of the time except for a few hours a week when the clerk is in there to process whatever things that she has to process.

It feels safe. It doesn't feel formal. It feels kind of worn around the edges and comfortable. It's not impressive or fancy but it's workable, it's usable, it's neutral. The vibe is not intimidating and we were comfortable there. We could move in and we could make it our own. Six of us [could be in there] sitting and talking. We felt like we could put our feet up on the chairs. We felt like we could laugh in there. We felt like we could talk comfortably. There was enough space. We didn't feel cramped. And it felt like it was okay for us to make it belong to us for the time of our being there. So if I were going to start up again, that would be one of the places that I would look to gather people at.

In Andrea's account there were no thrones or power tables, just a "big open room." We may wonder if indeed this village hall was a "no man's land" that was ripe for bringing people together. Without further research we are left wondering, but Andrea's narrative does draw our attention to how a community organizer can feel safe in a planning space and "make the space" her own. Indeed she raises the possibility that community spaces such as a

village hall can be perceived as inclusive sites where all citizens are welcome. Did the "cold and sterile" environment in fact support her work? It seemed to meet her purposes very well, but her description begs the question, would other residents feel as comfortable as Andrea? Even without statistical proof, Andrea's own experience is enough to guide her practical theory. As she repeats, "If I were going to start up again, that would be one of the places that I would look to gather people at." In the next section on outreach, Andrea reveals how crucial these planning meetings were as an important step for this new group to prepare for door to door surveying, and other outreach efforts to engage local residents in energy issues, and begin the long-term process of nurturing citizen engagement.

3.7 Themes

From the three narratives each organizer describes their overarching goals differently and presents a unique personal relationship with the community where they live and organize. The organizers practice stories and reflections are embedded within rich personal histories, years of interactions within the spaces and places of these communities, and complex webs of social relationships. As local organizers they are committed to youth empowerment, balancing the three domains of community sustainability, and nurturing the tender shoots of citizen engagement. Through their independent encounters with the director of the county cooperative extension they choose to align themselves and their organizations with the Heating Solutions Project. Each mentions examples of long-term goals such as increasing communication

between residents and strengthening social networks within the communities. Another primary goal they each speak about is the improvement of access to and utilization of residential energy efficiency measures in their communities.

In order to move the Heating Solutions Project forward in their areas, each organizer helped initiate planning meetings with other organizers, local leaders, and interested residents. The narratives each close with a story of recent planning meetings that took place within the physical arrangements of a courtroom, a village hall, and a manager's office. Across their many differences, these organizers considered the spaces they used to be appropriate for the purposes of planning meetings. Throughout American history, town halls and other formal public spaces have been the traditional meeting place for grassroots community organizing and democratic dialogue.[3] At the same time their narratives expose the many different ways they were impacted by the spaces they used. If, as often is done in social sciences, we considered the physical, emotional, and the socio-historical realities separately we would not see how organizers themselves appear to experience all of these dimensions simultaneously. [4]

While the narrators themselves do not consciously speak of the interactions between all these dimensions, looking across all three narratives patterns begin to emerge of how these organizers experience the spatial dimensions of planning meetings. Particular spaces and places can feel more or less inclusive and safe. Other sites can remind people of exclusion and

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[3] See Zimmerman (1999) for an exhaustive study of the New England town meeting tradition and how it has impacted modern democratic communities through today. He goes as far as to say that the Town Meeting is the; "leading national symbol for grassroots democracy" (191).
[4] In *The Experience of Place* (1990), Tony Hiss describes the human capacity to experience multiple dimensions of social, historical, emotional, and physical realities as 'simultaneous perception.'

social distance. Each of these experiences also seemed to revolve around relationships with the physical arrangements of tables and chairs. Three distinct spatial experiences emerge: the throne, the power table, and the no-man's land. Each articulation appears to be deeply meaningful as an emotional experience, a socio-historical moment, and a sensory experience of physical arrangements in a particular place. Indeed as we look into the spatial dimension of the narratives in this chapter they begin to shed light on the complex interactions of material space, subjective experience, history, and social relations that unfold in the process of community organizing in the everyday spaces of our communities.

Nancy's story of the planning meeting in the park manager's office is more than a simple description of relationships and communication. There is a spatial dimension to her account that grounds the relationships and dialogue in a particular physical arrangement. Nancy shared, "[The manager had] a pretty good sized desk. There was a great distance between us… He was in his own spot and we were all out here [on the other side of the desk]." The manager was "the boss ... up on this throne." If we turn to the beginning of the narrative we may recall her experiences of growing up in a place "frequently looked down upon." Although she describes the manager as "open-minded" she feels intimidated and detached by his presence within this particular spatial and social situation. "Such a distance you know. It kind of made me feel detached."

In the face of these "barriers" Nancy speaks to the manager about her goals to help people who are in situations similar to her own youth. She presents the youth empowerment programs that she has developed. Why might Nancy experience a common office desk as a barrier between her and

the manager? One could imagine that from this manager's desk decisions are made that affect residents lives without their participation. Decisions are made "up there" on a "throne." The mobile home park is not managed as a participatory democracy. This community is a private business managed from this office and from behind this desk in particular.

Nancy's story raises the question, would she have experienced the meeting differently had it been in another location? Indeed, Nancy later informally explained to me that after I had left our meeting with the park manager, he and Nancy took a walk around the park. She recalled how almost immediately after leaving the office she felt more comfortable with the manager. Once their meeting was no longer organized around the office desk and had come out into the open, her experience shifted. By the end of the afternoon Nancy and manager had agreed to work together to expand the OURS program into this second park.

While our Youth Fun Day organizing team did not transform the history of the manager's office, or immediately eliminate the undemocratic powers alive in the spatial arrangements of the office, we may have temporarily opened up and claimed the office space for the alternative purpose of building social connections, strengthening social networks, and engaging the residents in energy efficiency education.[5] However we theorize about the underlying processes that unfolded that day, Nancy's story paints a complex picture of how a community organizer experiences a particular space and place.

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[5] The ethnographic work on community organizers by King and Hustedde (1993), and the more recent writings of Kesby (2005) and Cornwall (2006) on participatory community development speak of how people who are organizing for change in communities often "open up and claim" spaces where community members can dialogue and plan in new ways. The term was apparently derived from Foucault's (1984) descriptions of "acts of power."

Anthony's story surfaces similar issues with space and power. He tells of how planning spaces can come alive with experiences of exclusion, barriers, distance, intimidation, and even silence. He speaks about the strong feelings that can emerge when he is meeting in the courtroom within Caroline's town hall. Anthony was one of several local residents who founded a new community group called Energy Independent Caroline (EIC). Anthony was the youngest member of the group. Yet he is also one of the town council members who use the same courtroom room for official council meetings. Anthony has a personal history with this room. Once he was even an intern for the town council.

His narrative illuminates how meeting in the town hall as a community organizer with EIC is intertwined with his other experiences and uses of the space. When he is in the room during an EIC meeting the memories of Town Council meetings and his days as an intern are right below the surface. Anthony's narrative communicates a sense that such formal settings often have a history that is inscribed into the walls and tables of the place. Such spatially situated histories seem to evoke memories and stir emotions of people who use them in the present. [6]

Although we hear about various material details of the town hall space, such as "the ugly carpets", "naked chairs", and the historical schoolhouse days, the "power table" becomes the focus of Anthony's narrative. When Anthony sits down at the, "big huge long, big heavy wooden table" he is not sitting in a neutral space. Anthony is upset about the way the table shapes the relations in the room. "It was kind of like awkward a little bit… It's not an

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[6] See Lefebevre (1991) where he thoroughly describes how histories of power relations are inscribed into space.

equal setup and it feels weird for me…its very off-putting, extremely, even for me." Similar to Nancy's experience of the manager's desk, the "power table" or "table of authority" is alive with the histories of exclusive decision making in his hometown. "[Local decision makers] sit around a table where you're not part of the discussion." There is a history of power relations that he is also physically situated within. His account of planning meetings held at this particular table point to both the real and imagined qualities of the space. [7] The table is cast as both a physical object and a complex set of subjective experiences.

As political philosopher Hannah Arendt theorized, "the table" in public life signifies and operates as both a separator and connecter between people.[8] There is the possibility of bringing people together and distancing people in the same space. Anthony speaks about the isolation that it creates on both sides of the table. During Town Council meetings the public sits away from the table in the audience while the council members are stationed behind the table. The table of power divides the public from those with formal decision-making power in this township. Anthony is aware of this division although he is uncertain about how it affects the people on "the other side".

Anthony also mentions that the town hall is also the local courtroom. The room is filled with objects and artifacts that communicate the formality of the room as a government sponsored judicial space. The, "whole judges thing [is] in front." In addition, Anthony's story of being an intern for the Town Council reveals the intensity of how power differences can play out in the spaces where organizers hold planning meetings. As an intern Anthony sat in

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[7] See Soja (1996) for a discussion of the need to integrate the real, or objective notions of space with imagined, or subjective, notions.
[8] See Gottsegen (1994; 52)

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the public area, away from the power table. From there he felt like a spectator. Although he knew the people sitting around the table and supported their work he was "afraid of authority." For one he was not part of the discussion that was taking place around the table. Proximity and access to the table seem entwined to one's level on the playing field of local decision making. The "playing field" was centered on the table. Through Anthony's story we see how quickly the experience of the playing field of power can shift when he is invited to sit at the table.

Although we cannot assume that everyone who participates in these planning meetings will share Anthony's experience, the "arrangement" of the courtroom appears to have implications on the roles that other people take on when they are positioned in this particular space.[9] The subjective, historical, and spatial intersect and intermingle in such social occasions. The material and the imagined become hard to disentangle. Just as Anthony relates the instantaneous "leveling of the playing field" when he took a seat at the table, he hear about another organizer taking on the "deliberative, authoritative" role when sitting at the head of the "power table." Anthony also imagines the organizer seated in the audience taking on the "spectator" role when there is some distance between her and the "power table."

During their interviews Anthony and Nancy, like many of the organizers I interviewed, seemed surprised by the dynamic, and meaningful way that these planning spaces had impacted their experience. Andrea though, seemed to value the spatial dimensions of her practice more than others. She was the oldest and most seasoned organizer I interviewed.

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[9] See Werlen (1993; 171-178) for a discussion following from the work of Durkheim on the importance of spatial arrangements as factors that can enable and constrain the abilities of people situated within them to express their true intentions.

Perhaps she had learned to appreciate and anticipate the spatial dimensions of community organizing. Her story communicated a sincere thoughtfulness for the importance of community spaces. Her narrative reveals that she was already thinking ahead to her next project, and how she might continue to organize and build power from particular places in the community.

Unlike the sadness, intimidation, and thrones of courtrooms and manager's offices, the under used village hall from Andrea's narrative is a "comfortable place to meet because it is a no man's land." Although the space was funded by the local government and houses the town clerk, the judicial and managerial formalities from Nancy and Anthony's narratives are absent from Andrea's experience. For Andrea the village hall was an important resource for bringing people together, a "no-man's land."

Distinct from the locations available and chosen by other organizers, the village hall had "folding tables" and "mismatched chairs." The chairs were set up in a circle around a central table. Her experience of the spatial arrangement contrasts with the "big long wooden table" in Anthony's story, and the "throne" from Nancy's experience. Andrea told us, "It feels safe. It doesn't feel formal. It feels kind of worn around the edges and comfortable. It's not impressive or fancy but it's workable, it's usable, it's neutral. The vibe is not intimidating and we were comfortable there. We could move in and we could make it our own." We hear that some places are "okay for us [organizers] to make it belong to us for the time of our being there." The practice of "making it belong" may be seen as this organizer's own unique way of describing the work of 'opening up and claiming' spaces. While the

village hall might provide freedom from intimidation and exclusion for Andrea, these sites may not exist in other community contexts.[10]

In each narrative we heard of planning meetings in everyday places around the community. These experiences in community spaces that Anthony, Nancy, and Andrea spoke of were certainly not fully determined by the material arrangements. The organizer's experiences of these spaces detail the emotional and socio-historical meanings at play. While all three stories begin to shed light on the ways that power, inclusion, and exclusion are experienced in spatial terms, each narrative was vastly different. We are left wondering how much these subjective experiences really tell us about the importance of buildings, rooms, tables, chairs, photos, and many other physical dimensions of a space.

How does space and place really matter to the experience of community organizers? Are we reading too much into these narratives? Are these spaces really impacting the organizers, their emotional states, and their work, or are these locations more of a static stage where relationships and historical patterns unfold following their own momentum? In chapter four we will return to these theoretical considerations. For now we will continue to look into more narratives that help us see the interactions between personal experience, emotions, history, relationships, power, choices and the physical realm. The next set of narratives will draw our attention to the aliveness of these intersections within local homes.

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[10] See King and Hustedde (1993) for an ethnographic description of organizers who cannot find such "free" public spaces and create new ones to achieve their local goals.

3.8 Planning in homes

In the passages above, Heating Solutions organizers spoke about how they were able to bring people together in offices and public halls to dialogue, plan, and strategize. Several other organizers I interviewed also spoke about hosting planning meetings in the homes of local residents. The strategy of working from the home spaces of local residents is reminiscent of the common advice to young community organizers working in Mississippi during the civil rights movement. They were often told to, "Go to their homes, eat with them, talk the language they talk, associate with them on a personal level. Then go into your talk about [the issues]."[11] From my interviews it appears that homes were used generally after several meetings had occurred in more formal, public venues, such as those already discussed. Home meetings were organized after engaged residents had already established relationships or had begun planning together. From my own experience as a Heating Solutions organizer and the stories we hear below, planning meetings in homes are dramatically different then meetings in town halls and offices.

3.9 Sarah's porch

The importance of the home space for planning meetings first stood out to me through a first hand experience. I was trying to bring residents in the mobile home parks together for a planning meeting. After the meeting with the

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[11] Payne (1995; 143)

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mobile home park manager that Nancy spoke of earlier, we held a successful Youth Fun Day during a warm summer day in a central field of the mobile home park. Over 30 youth and 10 adults attended. The event was fun for the kids, and intentionally created a new and convenient space where we could talk with adults from the community about energy issues. Sarah, one of the parents I met that day, soon became involved in the project. During our initial meeting at the Youth Fun Day, she expressed a willingness to meet again to discuss the project. During a follow up phone call she was quick to offer her porch deck for our next meeting. She explained that her place was often used for barbeques and other local events. Up until that point all of our planning meetings had occurred far away from the park in formal conference rooms or the park manager's office. I imagined that Sarah's porch would be a space that was near and familiar to the other residents who we wanted to invite.

Although Sarah lived down the road from the park many of her friends through the local church were residents of the park. Her house was down a long driveway in a field surrounded by a small grove of trees. The scenery was beautiful, and I could tell why she hosted events there. All of the meeting participants sat around a small table on the porch together and talked candidly about the struggles of the community, its assets, and the complexity of dealing with energy use in mobile homes.

I heard more accounts of how residents do not have much ownership or control of the spaces they inhabit. Everyone walked away more motivated to be involved, and with several tasks to accomplish. Within two months our small team of local residents had organized an Energy Workshop at the local Baptist church. We also began to engage the church youth group in energy related community projects. The meeting on Sarah's porch was a turning point

in my work in the mobile home parks. I was not surprised when I began to hear how other organizers hosted planning meetings in their own homes.

3.10 Rachel's living room

In my interviews with other organizers I repeatedly heard similar accounts of successful planning meetings held in their own homes. One account came from Rachel, an organizer who assists small farmers through Cornell University. She also worked closely with Anthony on energy issues in Caroline. During Anthony's interview he had suggested that I speak with Rachel about her experience. After several months of interviewing, I contacted Rachel and she invited me to her office. One of the first things that I learned was that Rachel was a newcomer to Caroline who had quickly dropped into the town's community life.

> *I have only lived there for a little over a year now so I don't have a long history here, but I love living there. Both my husband and I grew up near Syracuse. We had wanted to come back home and live closer to family. We had been in the process of moving home for a long time. We had a pretty amazing experience of moving into a home that had been occupied by a couple for 25 years. They had a pretty strong community of friends in the vicinity and they welcomed us right into that community of people. We were invited to a potluck dinner the first night that we moved into the house. Some of those people [at the potluck were community leaders.] That's how we got to know them and that kind of led to us getting involved with energy within Caroline.*

Soon after their introduction to these local leaders Rachel and her husband began attending the meetings of Energy Independent Caroline. I asked her to tell me about the experience of getting involved with the Heating Solutions Project and what she hoped would come of their efforts.

Anthony brought the Heating Solutions Project to our attention at an Energy Independent Caroline meeting. We invited the cooperative extension director to come and speak with us. I think I missed that meeting. After that I kept hearing little whisperings about it and had heard that it had been really successful in Freeville. Our group decided that it would be a really good first thing for us to do to help build our grassroots base. The project could serve the dual purpose of focusing on energy conservation and getting to know our neighbors and letting them know that Energy Independent Caroline existed. We thought some of our other goals [such as wind energy produced in Caroline] were long term and this was something that we could start doing right away.

I think we also hoped that we would be able to gauge a bit more of what the support base would be and what opposition there might be for some of our longer term goals around wind energy. But there was a pretty strong element of just community building in general. We hoped to have more people talking about energy issues, and to have our group and specifically the Heating Solutions Project help to create a forum for people to share their skills. Anthony spoke about having someone come out and do a Save Energy Save Dollars workshop in our community to make it easier for people to attend. Overall, starting to build momentum around energy issues was another goal we hoped that this would relate to.

On a personal and individual home scale if you want to put in some kind of renewable energy system the first thing that you do is figure out how to conserve energy so that you can put in a smaller system. I saw the Heating Solutions Project as doing that on a community scale. We could get the whole community to be aware of how much energy we're using, get people to reduce their energy use, and help people who need the most help. Those would all be really positive outcomes inline with our larger goals.

Rachel explained that shortly after Energy Independent Caroline agreed to work on the Heating Solutions Project they began to have focused planning meetings in the homes of group members. Anthony shared his experience of planning meetings in the Town Hall, and we now hear from Rachel about the "planning retreats" held in her living room.

We called them retreats only because they were not at our normal scheduled meeting time. But I think it was also to imply that we have a lot of work to do and that as a group we need to sort of "retreat" and figure some things out. We have actually had two [planning meetings] now [at our house]. I love hosting meetings, so I really enjoyed it. I'm comfortable in my own space and when we host a meeting at someone's house, particularly at our house, we generally try to involve food. I find that food and drink greatly enhances a meeting.

As opposed to meeting in a more sterile or institutional environment like the town hall, one person is lounging on the couch, and another one in the [lazy boy]… I feel more creative and more relaxed at meetings like that than I do when I'm sitting around a huge board table in a stiff chair… The living

room is pretty eclectic. It's sort of a rugged lime green color. I painted the front
of the entertainment center with a big purple tree and a sun behind it. And
there's painted lizards on the wall and some kind of funky things. But none of
the furniture is terribly comfortable. We still have pretty much inherited
furniture from various sources. …Often if we're having a meeting we are
trying to plan something out and it's good for people to feel really comfortable,
relaxed and creative. Those are the three most important elements to me in a
meeting. It doesn't have to be our house. We had a meeting at Ron's house
[also]. I think we'll probably in general keep trying to do that.

Through Rachel's account we hear of the many differences that she experiences between her home and the Caroline town hall. Rachel also describes her feelings as the host of the event. Apparently the home space was useful for Rachel and the group in ways that the public spaces were not. We see how comfort and informality are highlighted. Although I was familiar with the practice of hosting planning meetings in homes I was surprised to hear the benefits so clearly summarized. Not surprisingly, Gabriella, an organizer across the county in Ludlowville, also reflected on the unique value of hosting meetings in her own home.

3.11 Gabriella's dining room

Gabriella and I had worked together on other local initiatives in the county. Yet before her interview we had never spoken directly about the Heating Solutions Project. I visited her at home one rainy afternoon. Sitting in her

kitchen, over cookies and fruit, she told me about her background and experiences as a respected community leader and organizer. Like many of the stories I collected through the interviews, Gabriella's personal experience is woven together with the particulars of the community she has lived in for over 25 years.

I have lived here in Ludlowville since June of 1979. I bought this house when I came here to do my master's degree at the local university. Ludlowville is a very old hamlet in Lansing and it actually predates the city of Ithaca. Long ago Ithaca was a swamp. The 50' waterfall up the road was the source of power so Ludlowville was a lot bigger than Ithaca for a long time. It was a big commercial district and all the farmers came into Ludlowville. This house was built in 1925 and probably one of the first pastors lived here in the Baker house.

Professionally I have several hats. I work 2 jobs mainly. Half-time as a regional Energy Smart coordinator for the Southern Tier which is done through Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, but I work across Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben and Tompkins Counties. I am basically trying to tune people in to energy efficiency and renewable energy options. I am also the program coordinator for Sustainable Tompkins. For that I'm involved in many different aspects of pushing the sustainability conversations forward in the community. I'm the president of the Green Resource Hub of the Finger Lakes, which is an offshoot of Sustainable Tompkins. One of the projects will be a consumer education center for green building, energy efficiency and renewable energy. I'm also starting to put together a big regional healthcare and sustainability conference for next April.

Then there are lots of other things I do that aren't paid projects but are things like engaging the city and the county in sustainable development, planning, and systems thinking. We are having conversations [with local stakeholders] and trying to connect green developers with city planning staff and economic development staff. I'm a nudger. I sometimes feel like I function like a "condensation nuclei" in a cloud that starts to rain, where I don't take credit for all the elements that were in the community or for what flows out, but I recognize that sometimes I've come in and become the condensation point so that finally something moves. Mainly it's because of that visioning and organizing aspect of what I do. By showing up often enough, finally something condenses.

Gabriella went on to tell me how she was involved in the Heating Solutions Project both at the county level through her Energy Smart position and within her own hometown. She was a professional in the energy field and a participant in the county level Heating Solutions planning meetings. Her story provides more background on the early stages of the county level planning process. Although her background with the project was distinct from many of the other organizers her goals for the Heating Solutions Project sounded very familiar.

My involvement started because of my role as the Energy Smart coordinator. The director of Cooperative Extension and the heads of quite a few of the human services agencies in the county started meeting a year ago in August because of concerns about price spikes in home heating fuels. We knew that a lot of the [energy companies'] heat allowances and [state funded] emergency

assistance for home heating was going to run out very quickly for low-income
people. The agency leaders recognized that they weren't well coordinated
amongst themselves. We started meeting and came up with the idea of a public
energy workshop for clergy, landlords, food pantry workers, and people at the
front line who would likely interact with low-income people. They were invited
to a workshop where different service agencies including extension, energy
related or home repair, and insulation related services came together, so that
[the front line] people could see how you would go about helping somebody in
need, including what you could pull off a shelf and what support they might
apply for.

Also from the beginning the extension director had the idea that it's not
just about making sure we're partnering well on providing emergency
assistance. And we were all in agreement. What we really wanted to do was to
get the housing stock fixed up and get people educated about energy so that we
are not always rescuing people. That is the most expensive way of dealing with
the problem. With taxes going up and the middle class becoming more and
more at risk because of gaps between the rich and the poor, and all the other
economic conditions, this seemed like a really smart thing for us to do at the
county level.

By then the group had named itself Heating Solutions. The extension
director provided the leadership around trying to conceptualize how would we
harness the energy of the grassroots. We wanted to engage the grassroots in a
way that not only brought information about energy efficiency into people's
hands, but would also build social networks that would be available when the
next crisis arose whether that might be avian flu or some kind of terrorist
attack. We all participated in that discussion of how to design it. They field

tested it in Freeville and meanwhile through energy smart communities we
were field testing the energy survey at Ithaca Festival and other events such as
Earth Day, the university's Energy Fair. Eventually I started talking about
the piece of it in my own community?

Although Gabriella was involved at the county level she also had a
more localized history of experiencing the resistance of rural communities to
change within her own backyard. These experiences appear to influence her
approach to community organizing. When I asked her about taking the
Heating Solutions Project to her town these past experiences appeared to
impact how she proceeded.

I wouldn't say I had any big goals for the Heating Solutions in my area. I have
been an active community member for 20 years and have been burned badly in
terms of running up against that rural traditionalists saying, "We're sure as
hell not going to do any project that some progressive from Ludlowville is
leading." That's really what it comes down to. So I was approaching with
caution and saying, "I'll find, recruit, and identify the people like the church
people and try to nudge that forward, but I'm not going to take responsibility
for the outcome there.

Well in my town there were two kinds of broad objectives. One was to
kind of collect the information on what people are already doing and what they
haven't done. The other was to, for those that need help, see if we can help them
and. In Ludlowville I recruited 4 other people to help me do the survey work of
finding out what people have done. I was doing, "Who's volunteered and been
interested in the past?" kind of thinking. I figured that 5 of us for little tiny

Ludlowville would be enough. There's about 70 houses. I figured if I got 5 volunteers and we only had a little strip of 10 to 12 houses each we would get it done because we're all busy. I thought that it would be surmountable.

Gabriella then spoke about how she oriented the volunteers.

We met one-on-one. Tanya [one of the volunteers] was feeling like I really don't know anything about all this kind of thing so I would like to come and learn more before I feel comfortable going door-to-door, with the survey and the brochures and the light bulbs." She and Frank [the other volunteer] were the ones that found time to do that. I ended up having one-on-one conversations with the two of them around putting together the packets and the clipboards of surveys, brochures. I had written up a little opening riff for us to use at people's door. It was a suggestion of what we might say when we knock on people's doors.

Like many of the other organizers I interviewed Gabriella quickly passed over the locations where she met with the volunteers and what those "one-on-one conversations" were like in that place. When I asked her to tell me more about those meetings she began to tell me about how she used her home as a meeting space.

I tried to invite [all] 4 Ludlowville folks that I asked to help me to my house. I was going to have them come over on a Sunday evening, feed them tea and cookies, and jam a little bit about the [Heating Solutions Project]. It was impossible with everybody's schedules… I suspect that if I had been able to

make every schedule work instead of just going "Oh well, I will do it individually" we probably would have had a greater commitment and follow through. If they had had that chance to bond as a group of the leaders…. the project would have turned out different.

Tanya was the only volunteer that Gabriella managed to schedule a meeting with.

[Tanya and I] may have sat in the dining room because this was wintertime and the stove is in there, the wood stove. [My dining room has] some elements of it that are pretty cozy in terms of its new hearth and there's a lot of rose tones and greens so it's a color scheme that's relaxing to people. It's also got stacks of projects all over and brochures and sustainability stuff (chuckle). There is an old drafting table that's pretty stacked with stuff not overly cluttered but definitely a sense of space in which somebody is doing projects. It was a Saturday or a Sunday afternoon that she came over. Maybe she was here 45 minutes or so. [I was] just trying to get her a little more comfortable with the project. She had more concerns about "how do you do this?" and "what is this about?" [In the end] Tanya did her area. She was probably the most responsible one.

In Gabriella's case her strategy was to pull together a group of volunteers interested in energy issues to help engage their neighborhood. Gabriella's living room turned out to be a very useful space in the orientation of these volunteers. She wanted to "host" a "jam" at her house where they could build "greater commitment and follow through, and bond." This type of

meeting might help the small group think together about getting even more neighbors involved, and other future activities. Even though the full group meeting never happened, we learn about how Gabriella offered a comfortable space in her home for her planning conversation with Tanya. As it was Tanya turned out to be the most reliable volunteer to support Gabriella's work on the Heating Solutions Project in Ludlowville.

Was the home space an element to the success of orienting Tanya and helping her become "comfortable" with door-to-door outreach? From Gabriella's narrative we hear about the qualities of the space that may have aided in this effort. Are "comfortable" home spaces truly supportive for forming bonds and strengthening commitments? Gabriella suggests that if more of the volunteers had participated in these home meetings there would have been greater success. From the challenges associated with bringing people together we can imagine why emails and phone calls are very attractive to organizers. Communication technologies require less scheduling.

3.12 Themes

Rachel and Gabriella's narratives, along with my own experience on Sarah's porch, bring us into the lives of organizers who had meaningful experiences using homes as locations for planning meetings. The personal history they shared with us helps contextualize their recent experiences of planning meetings within their larger life story. Like the narratives in the earlier section, both organizers articulated their long term, broad commitment to community building in different ways. Similarly they both opened their home

spaces to bring people together. In affect, they invited their neighbors into their personal space.

Both narratives give us some insight into the experience of hosting a planning meeting. Unlike the public venues discussed earlier, these home spaces were presumably more private sites where the homeowner, as the host, played an important role. In our consideration of the public venues earlier, we never heard from the building managers of the village hall or the town hall. Possibly the park manager was in a similar host role, but within his workspace. The manager did not live in the mobile home park that he managed.

Within these more intimate home spaces we could imagine that the host and all the guests are more vulnerable then in public settings. The hosts and guests may each take on risks when they agree to use private spaces for public purposes.[12] The hosts are inviting other people into their own private space while the guests have traveled onto the territory of another person. Hosting seems to be an important activity that directly involves granting access to and lending the use of the space.[13] After reading these accounts we may wonder if planning meetings in homes present a unique intertwining of the personal and the social aspects of community organizing, distinct from those experiences described in the last section?

The slogan from the social movements of the 1960's may apply in this case where the personal has become political. Indeed organizers of various social movements have historically used living rooms for meetings to

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[12] See Coles (2004; 695) for a discussion of "vulnerabilities" in hosting meetings.
[13] Coles (2004) also describes how hosting the planning work of community organizing is a way of effectively sharing power and building power within the community.

dialogue, plan, and to strengthen their organizational capacities. [14] Living rooms are typically far away from the "power tables" of courthouses and town halls. These home spaces may serve as a safe space where people can take on controversial issues.

In this role, homes offer a paradoxical space that is both seen as safe and yet all the participants may be more vulnerable. Perhaps this paradox allowed for homes to be an effective space for Heating Solutions organizers to facilitate new "bonds" and "commitments." Additionally each person has been invited to be there, directly or indirectly, by the host. In part two of this chapter on outreach we hear accounts of more popular spaces where people already gather. By contrast, the home spaces we have considered here appear to be an invitational space where inclusion in the meeting is predetermined and managed by the host. [15]

I learned about this mix of vulnerabilities and possibilities first hand through the meeting I organized that took place on Sarah's porch. On Sarah's porch, I was the outsider. I was the guest who had been invited into a new space. I had been invited into a place that was already richly meaningful to a resident and her network of friends and family. I was on her territory. [16]

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[14] See Evans and Boyte (1983) for a concise history of how movements for women's equality in America have often used living rooms, as locations where women have control. Building on this work, King and Hustedde (1993) provide thick descriptions of community organizers in Kentucky who work with local residents to host planning meetings in local living rooms. Often times food is associated with home based gatherings.

[15] Cornwall in *Space of transformation? Reflections on issues of power and difference in participation in development* (2004), makes a distinction between popular and invitational spaces. Interestingly, the planning meetings we have discussed here that takes place in residents homes seems to fall in between these categories. Cornwall generally saw invitational spaces as highly politicized large representative and heterogeneous gatherings while popular spaces are arenas where people gather with others like them in collective action and self-help initiatives. Yet the home spaces we have heard about are both invitational and popular.

[16] Cultural anthropologist, Edward Hall (1966) provides an excellent discussion of how territorial boundaries and spatial arrangements are an element of cultural systems. Hall expresses a deep concern that American's typically lack sufficient appreciation for these

Indeed, I felt both vulnerable and excited that Sarah was willing to make her space available for moving the project forward. Having the meeting on Sarah's porch, instead of inviting residents to come to a far away conference room, was intended to spread out the ownership of the project. We were attempting to create an opportunity for often marginalized low-income, rural residents to host a planning meeting in their own space.

Sarah's porch offered the planning process a location that was hosted by someone close to the community and within the local social network. During that meeting, planning discussions with residents were situated in Sarah's porch. Gathering those residents anywhere less familiar would have been difficult. Unlike the legal and political history of the town hall in Anthony's narrative, Sarah's porch was marked by a history of informal social gatherings such as picnics and barbeques. Although Sarah's porch was not a space invested with formal authority to make decisions for large groups of people, through our planning group's collective efforts we could affect change in the community. In effect, bringing the planning meeting to Sarah's porch may have temporarily opened up and transformed this politically marginal, private site into a political space often monopolized by the formal public spaces of town halls and courtrooms. With this experience behind me, when I heard of Rachel's and Gabriella's story I wondered how these planning meetings would have turned out without the private, familiar, and comfortable settings where they took place.

As Rachel explained in her narrative, formal settings can be "sterile… [and] harsh places." In contrast the homes she and Gabriella described were

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spatial dimensions of culture. As a result American's tend to be blind toward meaning of spatial arrangements and "overstep" other's boundaries.

comfortable and safe spaces. The home is a gathering place where engaged residents are able to be "comfortable, creative, and relaxed". Rachel described the spacious seating arrangements that orient the group in a circle with no central worktable. This is in direct contrast to the formal settings that all included a literal 'planning table.' There is no "table of authority" or "throne" in Rachel's living room. Of course she is describing her own living room so perhaps other participants would have a radically different experience. This was not the case. Months earlier Anthony had also shared his experience of the planning meetings in Rachel's living room, "We go into a more intimate space. We go into a more comfortable space and just hammer out the issues. That's something [to help] support each other in thinking through how to do this and making a plan." Both Rachel and Anthony seemed to value Rachel's living room as a space that helped them forward the Heating Solutions Project.

Rachel and Gabriella also seemed to value how the aesthetic qualities of their home spaces impacted the experience of the meeting. Rachel commented on the "eclectic paintings" on the walls that express her own creative spirit. Gabriella focused on the "warm [color] tones" of her living room that help make the room feel "cozy." The inclusion of food with the "living room retreat" adds another layer of familiarity and comfort to the meeting. We could imagine there are more aspects of the home spaces that are not explicitly mentioned such as furniture, pets, and decorations that are meaningful to the host. Even if a meeting participant is not familiar with these aspects of the home they may have a sense that the space is well worn.

In Gabriella's case a group meeting was not possible because of scheduling challenges, yet we hear about how one resident and friend, Tanya,

does come over to Gabriella's house for some "face-to-face" time. They sit together in Gabriella's living room filled with color tones that Gabriella tells us are "relaxing to people", a warm wood stove, and a desk "full of projects." We hear about Tanya "getting more comfortable" with the details of the outreach goals and strategies of the project. Interestingly, Gabriella never makes the direct conclusion that her time spent with Tanya at her own house made a big difference. We do learn that Tanya managed to do her entire outreach assignment, unlike the rest of the group that Gabriella never had "face-to-face" time with. Now there is no evidence that Gabriella's home space did anything, but we can see how the spatial dimensions of the meeting, such as the room colors, warmth, and 'coziness' of the room was on Gabriella's mind as an element in making Tanya more comfortable with the project.

Through Gabriella and Rachel's narratives we begin to see how community organizers experience planning meetings in home spaces. In these cases homes were used for meetings of people who had already begun planning together. They were not public meetings in the way that meetings at the town hall were "public" and "formal." The homeowner becomes the host and the other participants become guests, each exposing themselves to unique vulnerabilities and possibilities. The personalized arrangements of the space such as furniture and decorations are now more than expressions of taste; they now become factors that can contribute to the comfort of the space.

Part Two: Outreach

3.13 The spaces and places of outreach

To continue our exploration, part two focuses on the experiences of organizers engaging the broader public in the Heating Solutions Project. Engaging the public through various outreach strategies is a common practice of community organizers. Throughout the 20th century, community outreach campaigns have focused on voter registration (Payne 1995), environmental health (Fischer 2000), and social justice (Chambers 2006). Such outreach efforts are well chronicled. On any given day similar outreach campaigns can be seen advertised on the public announcement boards of communities across America. Most people have personally been approached in public places and local businesses with informational materials about this issue or that one, or they have answered the front door to find a friendly stranger presenting the information or a survey.

Organizers of the Heating Solutions Project I interviewed used outreach strategies as well. After significant planning work these organizers traveled out from the invited spaces[17] of homes, offices, and town halls into

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[17]Cornwall (2004) argues for increased attention to the spatially situated nature of power within practices of participatory community development. Invited spaces are unique, but not power-neutral, spaces where community organizers and development professionals manage dialogue and participation through facilitation skills. Although the facilitator role can support inclusivity and participation, challenges to building new democratic powers remain. Within invited spaces the possibility of public performances that do not accurately reflect the private realities that resident's experience remains.

different community places that were both chaotic and inspiring. Their efforts moved from internal planning work with their allies toward the engagement of other residents in dialogue about energy issues, attract grassroots leaders, and to provide practical information on home energy. The focus of the narratives shifted to the experience out there on other people's territory. From experiences in less familiar locations we hear how the work focused on carving out temporary spaces for outreach in visible public places such as churches, neighborhood parks, diners, and corner stores. The vignettes from Heating Solutions organizers that follow draw our attention to the physical settings of these occasions and the experiences of organizers in these particular places.

3.14 Outreach at events

Several of the organizers I interviewed described outreach at local events that were already a community tradition. In the first case we hear about an event that was created by Heating Solutions organizers but engaged local youth to draw the community together.

3.15 The Youth Fun Day in a mobile home park

In the last chapter we heard from Nancy about growing up in a local mobile home park and the "open-minded" manager "up on his thrown." During that planning meeting the park manager explained that the neighborhood's central field had a history of successful summer time events for kids. He was happy

to support the event since it was both focused on activities for kids and practical information for adults. The outcome of that planning meeting was a Heating Solutions outreach event in that central field two weeks later. I worked closely with Nancy to plan and manage the event. Because of our busy summer schedules we did not reconnect to discuss the experience for several months. In this short vignette from our in-depth interview Nancy shares some of the details of the event and her perspective on the setting where the event took place:

> *For the Youth Fun Day we had a little tent set up with a table and chairs beneath. With the table and the chairs in the shade you could just sit, talk, and relax. It was not like some "Rush, Rush!" sort of deal. The weather was good. It was a big field with plenty of space to move around. That type of setting, that environment, it's right in open view [of the main street and many mobile homes]. Once you got some people there, people just kept coming. It just kept growing. That was a really successful aspect of having it out in the field. That field is central to the park. It was the most effective out of everything that I've been involved in because we were able to get a lot of people of different groups together. With the mobile parks usually there isn't anything like that. Luckily there's a field that people use for games and activities and everybody goes by it when they drive into the park.*

The Youth Fun Day in the central field was a success for Nancy. The central field appears to have been opened up by community organizers for the

purposes of bringing people together.[18] Surely there were many factors that contributed to the event's outcomes. "Luckily" this was a community with a place "that people use" that "everybody goes by".[19] We hear how the central, visible, and outdoor location was an essential component to the event's success. The weather obviously could have ruined the event, but the unpredictability of weather was apparently a risk worth taking. The visibility, and proximity to the mobile homes combined with good weather provided the setting "to get a lot of people of different groups together." Bringing people together and engaging them in the Heating Solutions Project were their primary organizing goals. By the end of the event over six local residents had expressed interest in volunteering to support the project in their community.

Nancy's story focused on the elements of the space that supported the event's success. Not every experience with outreach is a success. Her short story leaves us to wonder what creates challenges to the outreach strategies of community organizers. How would a Heating Solutions organizer respond to a less ideal space? What factors may constrain dialogue and engagement of the public in other spaces? In order to explore more challenging experiences of outreach we turn to two short vignettes from Rachel that reveal several factors that can constrain an organizer's practice.

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[18] See Foucault (1984) for a discussion of how using power requires making available, claiming, opening up, and taking up spaces.

[19] Through informal interviews with over 10 other residents of this mobile home park and another nearby park, I learned that the parks generally lacked strong social networks and there were few opportunities for residents to come together on common issues and cultivate powers to respond to pressing issues.

3.16 A church fish fry and food pantry in a small town

In Nancy's story above, Heating Solutions organizers planned a whole new event. On the other side of the county, the planning meetings and retreats that Anthony and Rachel spoke of in part one led to outreach at existing events such as a local church's monthly fish fry and the weekly food pantry at the town's community center. These events presented Rachel with many challenges. The first story focuses on the local fish fry hosted at the local church:

> *[The Fish Fry] is a lovely event. There are lots of families there. I always feel like there's a good feeling of community there. It seems like lots of people come, not necessarily planning to see other people there but end up eating diner with their old dear friends from down the road. I talked to my neighbor, Daphne, who's a leader in the community. She has lived in Caroline forever. Her entire family lives there and she's the one who cooks for the fish fry at the church. A few weeks ago I approached her and asked if it would be okay if I tabled at the fish fry and she was like "Yeah sure whatever."*
>
> *[The Fish Fry takes place in] a big white clapboard church. They had a craft fair there not too long ago and [they do] a monthly fish fry. When you walk in the front door the entry way is actually quite long and there are huge wide doors leading upstairs. I've actually never seen a door quite that wide on the interior of a building. But the hallway is narrow. And then there was a bunch of clutter and everything because of the cashier table and the stuff that the [local] girls were raffling off.*

[When I arrived I realized] the entryway to the church, which in my mind was larger, was in reality pretty small. You come in and there's the cashier right on your left. I had thought that I could be across from the cashier so people would walk by me as they came in. But there was a table set up there already with Daphne's granddaughter who is 12 and some of her friends. They were selling raffle tickets for a huge auction that the church was having as a fundraiser in a few days. I didn't want to cramp their space.

So I decided to station myself in the entryway next to the cashier. I kind of ended up balancing myself on a pew in the little entry room. There was a pew all along the wall and for lack of any better place to put my stuff, that's what I was working with. The problem was that I didn't have any kind of a flat surface to display anything.... I went by myself so I was feeling a little lonely. I wished that I had someone to talk to or bounce ideas off of in terms of where we should be and how we should do this.

Through Rachel's story of the fish fry we again see how the common practice of outreach at a local event is not only embedded in the particulars of relationships and history, but also within space and place. The church is already a gathering place for the community, and the fish fry is a popular event where "dear old friends" could be found eating dinner together. While the Youth Fun Day was organized specifically to engage residents in the Heating Solutions Project, the fish fry had many other purposes and distractions. In this case Rachel's outreach takes her onto someone else's territory. She travels to the church's "lovely" fish fry where there is a "good feeling of community." Although the description sounds charming the

organizer was no longer on her territory. Rachel presented herself as an outsider being hosted by the local church and one of its leaders.

Since Rachel was generally unfamiliar with the details of this monthly event she was not fully prepared for the limited "flat surfaces to display anything." She also did not anticipate that other groups would claim the best spaces for their ticket sales and fundraisers. Her strategy to find a space "across from the cashier so people would walk by me as the came in" was constrained. In the end she adapted by "balancing myself on a pew in the little entry room" but remarks how her placement did not feel successful. Her story reminds us that not every site for outreach will be the sun drenched fields of the Youth Fun Day. In the next story we hear of her experience at the local food pantry adapting to another set of challenges and opportunities.

Anthony contacted me and said "Pauline Franks wants somebody [from Energy Independent Caroline] to come and do a presentation this Wednesday night to their group." I was like, "Who is Pauline Franks and what group is this and when is this?" This is back in September or maybe August. Pauline was the director of the local Community Center. She runs the food pantry and she also helps coordinate the apple pie baking bees. They have ten different pie bees to bake 500 pies for the annual apple festival. That's like a quilting bee where like a bunch of people get together and process the apples and bake them all together.

I had really short notice and tried to get in touch with this woman Pauline. I didn't even know who I was supposed to be presenting to or what exactly I was supposed to present about. But we've been continually trying to remind ourselves through this process that Heating Solutions is not about our

little group of six or eight people going out and doing all these surveys. It's supposed to also be about identifying community leaders who will take it to their neighbors. That was the thinking behind us presenting to the Community Center Board.

As it happened, Pauline and I didn't connect before that meeting. She didn't get back to me. So I contacted her and asked "Is there another opportunity when I can meet with some folks from the Community Center?" She said "Well, we're having a pie bee on Saturday." So I went on one Saturday to a pie bee and there weren't many people there. It was mostly two other women and Pauline. I administered the survey to them and that was good practice for me because it was a safe environment for my first time doing the survey. The bee was at the community center. It was a big huge cavernous space with like three little girls and these two women frantically rolling out dough and cutting apples.

I asked Pauline if there were other opportunities for us to get in touch with people to do the survey and to give them some information. She mentioned the food pantry. I was going to make a specific time to go and do it, but we have a new volunteer in the group who is just fabulous. When we were at the apple festival a week later, she went and talked to Pauline independently and set it up for us to come on the following Monday.

After describing the process of gaining access Rachel speaks about the evening at the food pantry:

I met the other volunteer there last night and it was chaotic. They were renovating that part of the community center. There were four or five guys

working on various aspects of the center coming in and out carrying building

supplies. We were in a huge garage that I think used to be part of the fire hall.

There were all these tables set up and boxes everywhere and five to ten

volunteers frantically unloading boxes of food in preparation for the people to

start flooding in. And the room that we were in was also filled with junk; all

kinds of furniture and bags and clothes.

 There was a very narrow, maybe five or six feet wide hallway, for

people to walk through, then all of the rest of it was just junk. It had pretty

high ceiling. I think there used to be fire trucks parked in there. It's a really tall

space. It feels like an industrial warehouse kind of space. Metal siding and

fluorescent lights. I enjoy chaos once I find my place in it. At first it was like

whoa, sensory overwhelm! The whole parking lot was full of cars. We didn't

know who to talk to or where to set up or anything. It was a lot of confusion

initially. But once we set up and carved out our little space in the chaos and

people started going by we got into a pattern. [Then] it felt more comfortable.

 We got a card table and set it up [in the hallway between the junk]

when we got there. It was a pretty effective place to be standing because

everyone had to walk by us. We often started with the question, "So are you

folks from Caroline and do you have any concerns about energy this winter?"

And [we] had some good conversations. I really like talking to people. I met a

neighbor who I hadn't met before who lives right on Buffalo Road, just up the

road from us. And I had heard all about this terrible story about his house

burning down and how they're going to be living in a trailer this winter with a

bunch of people, teenagers and toddlers and everything. I really like to connect

with people. You know just to hear people's stories and to give them a sense of

what we care about, what we're trying to do. It feels good.

Again Rachel works within the constraints of an existing event in the attempt to engage low-income residents. In the opening lines of this story we hear how a community space in a rural, low-income community is in transition. The food bank was once used as a garage "where fire trucks used to be parked." From research on upstate New York communities we learn that community spaces are often in transition, manifestations of shifting economies, local political struggles and shifting budget priorities.[20] The experience was intense for Rachel. "At first it was like whoa, sensory overwhelm … It was chaotic…volunteers frantically unloading boxes of food" she explained.

Rachel confronts unexpected physical limitations in "very narrow…hallways" between the walls of "junk… furniture and bags and clothes." Such experiences of transitory spaces suggest one reason to rethink the common bias in social theory and practitioner literature that assumes space to be static, dead, and fixed.[21] Given the circumstances Rachel and the other organizer, "carved out our little space in the chaos" for a "card table." Only after "I found my place in it [the chaos]" and "we got into a pattern" did the experience feel "more comfortable." Unlike the balancing act on a church pew, here she claimed "a pretty effective place to be standing because everyone had to walk by." Rachel's narrative reaffirms the importance of being central and visible themes raised in Nancy's narrative on the Youth Fun Day.

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[20] Fitchen (1991) provides a comprehensive view of the many vulnerabilities of rural New York based on nearly a decade of ethnographic work. In addition many of the organizers I interviewed talked about the vulnerability of community spaces to budget cuts, and shifting of local governmental priorities and failing local economies.

[21] See Foucault (1986), Lefebvre (1991), and Soja (2003). Each repeats the assertion that this assumption is mistaken and leads to an inaccurate portrayal of the dynamic between structure and agency, and the objective and subjective.

A visible space and table room for informational materials may not be enough to ensure effective communication with community members. Rachel also explains that "I really like to connect with people…hear other people's stories… and give them a sense of what we care about [and] what we're trying to do" Dialogue, or "good conversations" with other local residents "feels good" to Rachel. Since Rachel is not a low-income resident herself and has never received food from this food pantry her attitude appears to help her communicate with the residents she meets. The people who she meets are of a different economic class. As community organizers often do she has traveled across both the social and physicals divides that often keep people apart.[22] Rachel rarely attended these events but for the purpose of engaging a broader constituency in Energy Independent Caroline and the Heating Solutions Project she was willing to step outside the familiar places she frequented.

3.17 Themes

Rachel and Nancy's narratives help us situate the work of outreach. The social, historical, personal, and spatial dimensions taking place within the church, community center, and outdoor field weave together into a rich and meaningful experience. The narratives even seemed to reflect the assumption of the organizers that these places would be appropriate for outreach based on these histories. All three stories speak to the history of these physical sites as

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[22] Coles (2004) discusses the geographical ways that modern communities are segregated physically and socially into "gated oblivions … the various physical, symbolic, visceral/psychological walls between neighborhoods, people of different races and classes, citizens and foreigners." (p687) Nancy's work in the food pantry is an example of how community organizers can travel across these "walls" and dialogue with people different from themselves.

gathering places where people from the communities have come together for different purposes.

The organizers anticipated that people would be present since these locations had a history of local use. Even when existing events such as the fish fry or the food pantry were not available to embellish with outreach materials and "good conversations", Nancy's narrative speaks to how organizers can create new events in the right locations to engage people.[23] Interestingly both the new and existing events took place in these historical spaces, spaces that only became accessible through the organizer's previous relationship building with local leaders. A sense of inclusion in these spaces depended on a relationship with a local host.

The organizer's travels into the community spaces of other groups began with dialogues with the community leaders who helped manage these spaces. Similar to the need for the park manager's approval of the Youth Fun Day, Rachel went to the community center on a specific day to request the approval of the local leader who ran the food pantry. Only after conversations with these leaders did Rachel and Nancy feel comfortable bringing their outreach efforts into these particular settings.

The work of gaining access, of being included and accepted by the host, was worth their time since these locations were well suited for outreach. These were visible and central gathering places of different constituencies. The narratives go further to suggest that even within the larger space, such as the field or the church, increased visibility was better. Nancy's narrative focused our attention on the spaces where "everybody goes by…when they drive into

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[23] See King and Hustedde (1993) for ethnographic descriptions of community development practitioners "embellishing" local spaces with their own strategically designed events in order to engage residents in new ways.

the park." Rachel focused on the "effective place… [where] everyone had to walk by." There was an element of common sense behind these approaches. While planning meetings may have benefited from private locations, outreach was about engaging people and no organizer would want to be 'out of sight and out of mind' as the old saying goes. Outreach, as Rachel describes, may simply be about "carving out our little space" to dialogue and build relationships within larger public spaces.

The tricky act of "carving out" space was no easy matter, particularly with established groups competing for limited, visible public space. As we heard, with Daphne's granddaughter selling raffle tickets in the prime space Rachel wanted to use, the church community had its own distinct set of social priorities that shaped the spatial and social arrangement of the church hallway. Rachel, a guest in this space, was sensitive to the spatial need for visibility by the young raffle ticket sellers. "I didn't want to cramp their space." As a guest she did not assert herself and her own goals over the local priorities of "selling raffle tickets" for a fundraiser.

The power dynamics alive in community spaces are not always as clear as the "tables of authority" that Anthony spoke of in the last chapter. Exclusion can take the form of local, more indigenous priorities, trumping the more explicitly political goals of community organizers. In the practice of traveling into the spaces and places of others, organizers can expect to be surprised by the unique ways that new spaces can transform their work, shedding a new color on it, exposing the work to a new arrangement of community life. Learning to work with these surprises, getting comfortable with new, dynamic contexts is a unique challenge for organizers.

Getting "comfortable" within the local situation didn't appear to be a problem for Nancy in the mobile home park. Remember she was raised in a similar community, just minutes away. Perhaps she was accustomed to working in similar local mobile home parks and the field had few unanticipated constraints. In any community context, an organizer may be more or less familiar with the new territory. For Rachel, operating in an environment fairly new to her, and in a relatively more constrained situation, a sense of comfort emerged only after a routine was established in the food pantry. "Once … people started coming by we got into a pattern. [Then] it felt more comfortable." In the Fish Fry setting, Rachel was unable to gain this level of comfort. It appears that she was not able to find "her place" at the Fish Fry but achieved this positioning in the Food Pantry. Achieving this level of visibility and comfort, without imposing on any competing teenagers, was a success for Rachel.

Additionally, Rachel and Nancy emphasize comfort and relaxation as a means to support dialogue and other forms of social connection i.e. eating and playing. The Youth Fun Day created a space to "just sit, talk, and relax." Rachel emphasized the value of listening, "I really like to connect with people…to hear people's stories." The ability and desire to listen to "people's stories" is indeed an important skill for organizers to practice.[24] Most research on community organizing concludes with an emphasis on dialogue and relationships. These accounts remind us that interactions are taking place in the carved out spaces along hallways, entryways, and fields of very specific community spaces such as churches, food pantries, and mobile home parks. In

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[24] See Coles (2004) for a description of how listening across lines of difference is fundamental to building democratic power in communities.

this sense the narratives speak of how organizers work with physical, historical and social spaces that can support listening and sharing among residents.

3.18 Outreach in diners and corner stores

Distinct from the stories of organizers at special events such as the fish fry or Youth Fun Day, in this next section we hear about outreach in corner stores and diners. Historically these everyday places for gathering have been used by community organizers as sites to engage the public.[25] Unlike the monthly fish fry or weekly food pantry, people of a community gather in these places daily for conversation, food, and a sense of community. These are the cafes, coffee shops, community centers, beauty parlors, general stores, bars, and hangouts that get us through the day. Ray Oldenburg (1997) in "A Great Good Place" describes these sites as the core of public life outside of the home and work. The narratives that follow from two Heating Solutions organizers help us see how organizers experience these great, good places.

3.19 The Freeville Diner

In the last chapter we heard from Andrea about planning meetings she coordinated with the mayor and local post woman at the Freeville Village

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[25] Payne (1995) writing on community organizers involved in the voter registration drives of the civil rights movement confirms the historical importance of these sites for outreach. A civil rights organizer relates, "I would go canvassing, just talking to people in the community about voter education and registration… Hanging out in the pool halls, wherever people were, the laundromat, run around grocery stores, meeting people" (p. 145)

Hall. Another location that Andrea met with the volunteer team was the local diner. While the primary purposes of the meetings were to plan future efforts, in this account we hear how the diner became a valuable place for outreach as well.

[The Freeville Diner was a] plastic tables and greasy spoon kind of [place]. Nothing fancy about it. Homemade cooking. The cook doesn't say anything and the place smells of old grease. It was very funky but that was where everybody went. It had a lot of windows, which was really nice. So there was a huge amount of sun. It had a south-facing wall that was just solid windows. It was always warm and cheerful and sunny in there. It was always nice.

There's the laughter, the informality, the food, and the ease. [There was] no sense that you have to look a certain way or act a certain way or be a certain smart. It's another one of those neutral spaces. It's for everybody. You don't have to belong in order to be comfortable in a diner. Anybody can [be comfortable]. I mean the grandmothers who were more middle class with their blue hair and very nice little suits with little flower pins would come and be at the diner with the guys in their overalls and their fingernails dirty and their boots full of mud. Everybody was at the diner. It's a space that belongs to everybody.

You're there having your breakfast or a sandwich. That's your reason for being there. Or you're just sitting there reading the paper and nursing a cup of coffee for a few hours. It's not like you came to a meeting. That would feel so awkward. It's just that you're there and it's okay to strike up a conversation with somebody at the next table over anything. And I just do that all the time. People would respond to us. [The people] at the next table would

respond to our conversations or make comments on our conversations. "Yeah we're worried about that." And, "Yeah we're watching those prices go up." And then you could turn around and have a mini conversation with somebody that would educate them about something. They would say things like "No kidding. How come they don't tell us that?" And, " Well gosh darn you know." You could really do some informal educating. It was a place where it was okay to have conversations with strangers. It was okay to talk to people at the next table. You know it was comfortable. And there was a reason to be there that wasn't a meeting.

The diner was cool because there were people there to overhear our conversations who didn't have anything to do with us. It was definitely a gathering place. These are people who would never come to a meeting that you called about energy. You just never would get them there. It's the term 'meeting' itself [that] is a totally foreign concept. [The idea] that people would make a time and a date and a place to talk to each other about something that they care about? It's like, "Why? Just tell me now! Why do I have to wait until Tuesday and go there? If you've got something on your mind, let's talk." It's just such a foreign concept. And at the diner you can just talk to strangers.

That's how the diner was. You could just do a little bit of teaching, give a little tiny bit of information, and plant a little seed. And it's casual. It's informal. You're not preaching to anybody. You didn't call the meeting. You're not in charge. It's a completely different thing. In a public place like the diner nobody's an insider and nobody's an outsider. So the boundaries are down and people could talk to each other.

We hear Andrea speak to the spatially situated work of community

organizing. Unfortunately public spaces like the diner, steeped in local history

and social relationships, are becoming few and far between with the decline of

local economies and rise of national franchises.[26] The diner sounds like it has

all the right ingredients for engaging people, "sunshine… laughter, the

informality, the food, and the ease." Food and drink are the common reasons

why people are gathered at the diner. As we have seen across many of the

narratives, sharing and eating food is a focal point for people to gather and

helps a place feel more comfortable. Organizers seem to go where the food is

served, or offer it in their own homes.

Andrea goes on to describe how the diner is "one of those neutral

spaces." The description describes how the working class and wealthy are

equally welcomed in this inclusive atmosphere. Inclusiveness is exemplified

by the notion that "it's a space that belongs to everybody." While her

descriptions of the diner sound idealized, they are completely consistent with

extensive research on the qualities of such "great good places."[27]

3.20 The Enfield Corner Store

In contrast to the openness and inclusiveness that Andrea describes in her

town diner, another organizer on the other side of the county came in touch

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[26] Later in the interview Andrea laments the closing of the diner that has occurred during the months between the time she was actively involved in the Heating Solutions Project and the time of our interview. Oldenburg (1997) and other theorists of public space in America have warned that places like the diner in Andrea's story are increasingly rare and this indicates a deterioration in the ability of people to come together to create cohesive communities of place.
[27] See Oldenburg (1997)

with the exclusiveness of the corner store in her farming town. After a month of interviewing Heating Solutions organizers, a staff member at the county cooperative extension suggested that I contact Cathy, the president of the Enfield Community Council. Enfield is commonly known as one of the poorest townships in the county and has held on tightly to its agricultural roots. Cathy had spearheaded the Heating Solutions work in her town. When Cathy learned of my research she was happy to sit down for an interview about her experience. We met one afternoon in a meeting room in the corner of the county library. The interview was kept short because Cathy had to pick up her children from school. We begin with Cathy's connections to the community where she had become a leader.

> *My family and I moved to Enfield in 1998. It was a very spontaneous move. I was nine months pregnant at the time. We moved into a mobile home park there. We owned the home but not the land. Prior to that we had lived around Ithaca. At that point we didn't have a lot of community involvement. We were preoccupied with raising two small children. About the time the kids started going to school, at the Enfield Elementary School, my husband and I started getting more involved in the community. He became a volunteer fireman and I started working with the after-school program at the Enfield School. My work at the school led me to working with the Enfield Community Council. I found the school to be an extremely welcoming part of the community and the part of the community that draws people in and then sends them out to other parts of the community. I can safely say that the school is really the primary hub where people start to be involved in other aspects of the community.*

After hearing about her background I asked Cathy about her current community work in Enfield. She spoke about her efforts on the Community Council and the challenges she has faced working in a farming community where the demographics are changing with the influx of new families.

The Enfield Community Council is a not for profit 501C3. It has a very simple statement of purpose. The role of the organization is to efficiently use the resources that are available in Enfield. It's a very lovely thing. It gives me a lot of leeway in allowing the people who have interests to pursue them. Traditionally the Enfield Community Council has primarily served the youth of the area but we are not restricted to only serve children. The Community Council used to support and run the after school program. The after school program is now its own program independent of the Community Council. But we do run a six-week summer camp. We run middle school youth programming for after school hours. The kids have someplace to go and things to do. Throughout the year we constantly have programs running free. The town provides a significant amount of money for us to do that, almost 30-40% of our budget. We have a specific contract with the Town of Enfield even though we are our own independent not for profit. That money is specifically for youth programming.

[Apart from youth development] there doesn't seem to be a lot of mobilization of interest to do anything in Enfield. There are a lot of distinct camps. We have the firefighters here. We have the grange here. We have the community council and the school. And there hasn't been a lot of communication even between organizations that fill a similar purpose. It's been very frustrating. One of my personal goals and one of the goals for my

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organization is to efficiently use the resources that exist in Enfield. So we go to each of the different organizations and develop a contact.

*After doing that for a little over a year and a half now, I'm beginning to notice that people are starting to do the same. I never really thought of myself as a leader. I just know that if you have resources in a small community you need to share the resources to make the whole community successful and you have to have communication. What is lacking in Enfield, embarrassingly enough, is the communication piece. It seems everybody has these very set ideas. The fire department never does **this**, the ECC only does **that**, and the grange doesn't do **that**. I'm told this is how everything is. I'm looking to change that. There are other people who feel the same way. When I'm willing to take the risk to stand up and say something then there are a lot of other people that are slowly starting to agree with me.*

Before I became part of the community by volunteering I did not understand how things worked. I didn't know what organization did what. I didn't even know the Enfield Community Council had a summer camp. It took me a long time to figure out who did what and how they did it. I'm trying to make that a lot easier for people. By doing that, it has a tendency to make it easier for everybody else to understand where and how to volunteer. Many people have said that the school is the only welcoming place in the community. By trying to make these networks of communication, it's starting to change that. It's just a really slow process.

Similar to many of the other organizers we have heard from, Cathy's long-term goals for community were much broader then residential energy efficiency. Her efforts helped to create a more cohesive and engaged

community that could respond to pressing issues from youth development to economic crises. As I began to understand the breadth of Cathy's work I asked her to speak about how she became involved in energy issues and the Heating Solutions Project.

We focus so much on the children. We know the school has about 57% of its kids that get free and reduced lunch. That is a fairly high proportion. From those numbers it is possible to imagine that there are families that have real needs in the community. And there are families that may not be getting free and reduced lunch, but also have additional needs who are right on the border of working poor. To better the children's lives it's also important to do what you can to support the families. So we have gotten into energy conservation in the last year because of the rising price of gasoline and fuel oil. Fuel oil is one of the primary ways that people in Enfield heat their homes. We don't have natural gas out here. The oil prices have gone through the roof and there are many people who have been severely affected by that. When Cooperative Extension handed out a little flyer that said they would come, and do these different seminars we saw the one on energy conservation, the Save Energy Save Dollars workshop.

Enfield is a very small community. It is relatively poor in the scheme of things, particularly when you compare it to Ithaca. It would be nice to see some of the community get a break. Being someone who is still unemployed and working on the poorer side of things, although certainly not as poor as some of the families in Enfield, it's hard to choose between the fuel bill and the food bill. A lot of families are in that position. Any resources that I can personally bring to Enfield that will help make those choices easier or prevent

having to make those choices are a good thing. By starting with something that people really care about like energy, it's possible then to extend it to something else like education and literacy programs.

I'm not sure exactly what all the needs are, but there are needs that are being met by organizations that aren't in the community. Those organizations are in Ithaca. It would be very helpful if I am to be able to develop trust with the community. With the energy seminars it's very easy to say, "we're going to save you money, we're going to give you free products, and we're going to help you cut your energy costs." But those are all win-win things. There's no risk for someone to come to one of those seminars. But so by doing maybe they'll learn to trust the Enfield Community Council. When other things are offered it won't be as threatening. So the energy issue is a way to open the door to get other services out into the community.

We thought it seemed like the right time and the right community for doing that. It was very easy. I made a couple of phone calls to Cornell Cooperative Extension. We coordinated a couple of days and times that we thought would be convenient for people. The first day we chose was two hours before the food pantry starts. I think we had about 40 people who showed up for that one. We made it as easy as possible for people to attend. We provided childcare and an energy related child activity. The second seminar was held at the school in the evening. We made arrangements to have people call down and sign up. We also made arrangements to have apple cider and donuts, and something to entertain children. It was well attended. And I don't know exactly the numbers but I would say at least another 40 people.

The school and the community center are spaces that Cathy and the

Enfield Community Council count on for their work. When I asked Cathy how they spread the word about the seminars and engaged the community in their other projects, she also spoke about their use of the local corner store. There is only one store in Enfield. While it is a gathering point for the township, a "great good place" in Oldenburg's terms, from Cathy's narrative we learn how it was different from the "neutral diner" that Andrea spoke of earlier.

The school and the corner store are the only positive places to gather. And the other places are exclusive. You have to be a fireman to go to the firehouse. You need to be part of the grange or part of the church to use those buildings. And you know the town buildings are too small, overused, over extended spaces and are just unpleasant. I generated a flyer that we posted at the corner store. The village has a gas station and convenient store, but really nothing else.

The convenient store happens to be a gathering place for any number of people. It's really a convenient store that has a little bit of a snacky thing in it. There's people there hanging out all the time. There's coffee and there's a couple of tables. You have the convenience part in the back and you have the gas pumps out to the side. The cash registers are sort of at the corner by the front. In the back you've got like a little deli, fast food kind of thing and plastic tables. You can get a biscuit with eggs on it for breakfast or a hamburger later in the day. And apparently the mozzarella sticks are very good.

By posting [our flyer] there it's a good way to get a hold of people without going door to door. If you go at 8:00 in the morning and you can see every single farmer in Enfield sitting, having coffee. If you want to know gossip, that's the place to go. Of course when I walk in everyone stops and looks at me. They have no idea who I am, so I don't learn anything good. You

know I think I'd have to show up every day for a couple of months before I started getting included in the gossip. I don't know how the grapevine works yet in Enfield but there is a grapevine. And it's a decided grapevine. It's a very small community. There is a grapevine. I just don't know quite how to get it to work for me.If I was running for political office I'd make sure I hung out there every day. I mean the corner store is the only store in Enfield. So it plays a very critical role and we really benefit from their support. They'll put our flyers up and they will allow us to hang things in their windows and hand out things. It's really one of our central places that we go.

Through Cathy's narrative we can see how the corner store is important to organizers in Enfield. As a relatively new resident to Enfield, Cathy is not yet part of the grapevine. She doesn't have to be an old-timer to see the stores value to her projects. While the corner store is not a warm, sunny place of laughter, it is "a gathering place for a number of people", and "at 8:00 in the morning you can see every single farmer in Enfield sitting there having coffee." When Cathy is organizing events the corner store is "a good way to get a hold of people", and "it plays a very critical role" in their outreach. Overall the site is "one of the central places that we go." As Cathy explains, the village "really [has] nothing else" in terms of places for people to freely gather and converse as we heard about in the diner. Her description leaves many questions unanswered, but in only a few lines, her narrative reemphasizes several ways that community organizing is a complex social, historical, and personal activity situated within space and place.

3.21 Themes

Diners and corner stores are everyday places where organizers can meet local residents and engage them in their projects. The organizer's narratives demonstrate how these particular spaces and places, the Freeville diner and the Enfield corner store, matter to community organizers for the work of outreach. Andrea and Cathy's narratives, filled with rich experiences in these "great, good places" resurface several themes we have seen earlier. We hear about the places where people gather, good conversations, informal atmosphere, inclusion and exclusion, physical centrality and visibility, and food and comfort. Each story's distinct way of weaving these themes together help situate the work of outreach within fuller, more multi-dimensional contexts. As we begin to see the multiple, interacting dimensions of each 'situation', we are also able to appreciate new perspectives on the opportunities and constraints to community organizing.

Earlier Nancy spoke about the central field of the mobile home park as a place where "many different groups" can came together for the Youth Fun Day and other community events. The diner took on a similar "open" quality in Andrea's narrative. Andrea's experience of the local diner points to the many opportunities for dialogue and strengthening community connections that can emerge from outreach in this particular site. The diner was "one of those neutral spaces… a space that belongs to everybody." Her experience of a neutral space is on the other end of the spectrum from Anthony and Rachel's experiences at planning meetings in town halls and private offices. In those narratives, discussed earlier, the "table of authority" and "throne" images

where explicitly linked with distance, separation, exclusion and domination. In Andrea's narrative the diner was a "public place [where] nobody's an insider and nobody's an outsider. So the boundaries are down and people could talk to each other." Perhaps these are qualities of a "great good place" for outreach. Andrea's sense of possibility for the diner seems to come both from within her self, and radiates from the physical setting of the diner. "There was a huge amount of sun…It was always warm and cheerful and sunny in there. It was always nice." Her story mixes the physical qualities and the emotional mode. The diner was full of both real and imagined warmth, sun, and cheer. How much was actual sunlight and how much was Andrea's own experience of cheer and sun? The question is left open. Of course the windows may indeed be filled with sun since they do face south, but the story we hear is also partly her personal image of a space that inspires her. The narrative helps us see how Andrea's community organizing unfolds at the intersection of these real and imagined realms. These intersecting realms of experience can also constrain outreach work in other situations.

While the diner offered opportunities for Andrea to "do some informal educating" with local residents, Cathy's story of the corner store in Enfield described her separation from the local farmers. Cathy was relatively new to the town. Some families had lived in the area for generations. Cathy's family had been there just under 5 years. She was a working class mom, whose husband was a local volunteer firefighter. When she walked into the corner store, "everyone stops and looks at me because they have no idea who I am." From this stark example Cathy illustrated how exclusion takes place in the corner store. Cathy simply doesn't spend enough time at the corner store to be seen as a local and perhaps to be trusted.

She was familiar with many of the spaces of the community including the school and the community center, but the corner store was not her territory. Her identity as a relative new comer, working mom, and not as a farmer appeared to be related to her experience of being excluded from the local "gossip." She explains, "I don't know how the grapevine works yet in Enfield but there is a grapevine." Cathy is not deterred though. As a local community leader she imagines that if she wanted to she could change her experience at the store by spending more time there. In the face of exclusion Cathy asserts that she could build relationships and even political power from that place, "I'd have to show up every day for a couple of months, before I started getting included… [and] If I was running for political office I'd make sure I hung out there every day."

Cathy acknowledged her limitations at the corner store. She was not yet "getting included", in a place that, "plays a very critical role" in her organization's outreach work. Outreach was both constrained and aided through this particular context. As a "gathering place…[and] one of our central places that we go" the corner store situated the Heating Solutions outreach work squarely in both a physical place and a social and historical world. Compared to the more "exclusive…over extended… and unpleasant" spaces in Enfield such as the "firehouse…the grange…the church… and the town buildings" the corner store was valuable site for outreach. Although it may be valuable, as the fish fry and food pantry were for Rachel, organizers often use different strategies to optimize these particular spaces.

The conversational approach that Andrea describes is perhaps such a strategy for optimizing the qualities of informal gathering places such as diners, and corner stores. Nancy, as well, referred in passing to "sitting,

talking, and relaxing" about the energy issues during the Youth Fun Day. The strategy fits with the informal qualities of the Freeville diner, "a place where it was okay to have conversations with strangers…its not like you came to a meeting. That would feel so awkward…it's okay to strike up a conversation with somebody at the next table, over anything. And I just do that all the time." Andrea uses informal conversations to embellish the diner, bring issues to the surface of public conversation, and strengthen personal connections with other people in the community.[28] Andrea's strategy is just one among many, including Rachel's strategy of asking questions and listening to people's stories with sincere curiosity.

Through these detailed and nuanced narratives of outreach in particular community places, we deepen our appreciation for the complex 'situated'- ness of community organizing. The organizers find both opportunities and constraints within the spaces they use for outreach. Their experiences reveal both the real, material dimensions of these spaces and the imagined, subjective realms that make these places meaningful to the organizers and local residents alike. The organizer's experiences illustrate how these "great good places" are critical settings for their outreach work.

Their stories acknowledge how these sites are far more than just wood beams, tables, windows, and plates of food. These are increasingly rare places where people can come together for conversation and spreading information. In some places you can talk about issues that matter with strangers, while in other places the grapevine is more exclusive. In both cases these spaces were seen as invaluable for outreach. But outreach is not appropriate for all settings. Sometimes organizers move toward guarded territory where they are not

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[28] See King and Hustedde (1994) for examples of "embellishment" of existing spaces.

welcome. These experiences on other people's private territory bring organizers to the boundaries between public and private worlds, an edge that intensifies the experience of outreach.

3.22 Outreach in homes

Door-to-door outreach, or canvassing, is another common practice of community organizers. The strategy is also often used by political campaigners, marketers, church groups, and girl scouts to name a few. Along with outreach at events and local businesses, Heating Solutions organizers often went door-to-door, surveying local residents about their home energy situation and recruiting interested residents to become Heating Solutions volunteers.[29] In the Heating Solutions Project, canvassing was used to start conversations with residents about the issues and to identify residents who were interested in getting more involved. The door-to-door surveying was in fact the most common outreach method utilized by the organizers I interviewed.[30]

Similar to the outreach work we heard about earlier, when going door-to-door these community organizers were prepared with information about the project, talking points, and communication strategies to engage the residents. The organizers took the time to prepare scripts and strategies that

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[29] Warren and Warren (1977) discuss canvassing and warn that such a strategy is often met with hesitation, rejections, and disinterest, and only occasionally do residents openly engage with organizers who come to their house unexpected.

[30] Based on my informal conversations and interviews with members of the original county-wide consortium of agency leaders, I learned that the survey tool was initially developed by the county-wide planning team, and over the first two years became a primary tool for the overall Heating Solution project.

demonstrated their respect for the residents they visited. Andrea from Freeville recalled their preparations in her interview: "We made a plan and we talked about what our script [at the door] would be. We had a lot of conversation about what we thought would be a respectful way to say hello to people. We considered if we should ask them to do anything on that first time around or did we want to just give the survey."

As a common strategy of the Heating Solutions Project, each organizer had an experience with door-to-door canvassing. The experiences varied dramatically. I found the intensity of their short reflections on this strategy qualitatively different from other sections of their narratives. Unlike outreach in businesses and public events, door-to-door outreach occurs at the boundary between public space and private homes.[31] In the following section several organizers we heard from earlier reflect on their experiences and perspectives of door-to-door outreach and surveying. Each distinct perspective contributes to our exploration of how community organizers experience space and place.

Through the following short reflections we begin to see the potency of these boundary spaces in between the public and private spheres. While the goals for the door-to-door work are similar to the goals for engaging people at public events the setting is substantially different. Unlike events, home doorsteps are not generally places where the public gathers. The doorstep and entryway to a home is hardly a neutral space. In fact the following reflections illuminate the charged and contested qualities of this boundary space. We begin with Gabriella's short reflection on door-to-door surveying in the

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[31] Oldenburg (1997; 35) describes the home as the "first space", work as the "second space", and public settings as "third spaces." Door-to-door outreach is an example of an organizer attempting to bring social interactions generally accepted in third spaces to a first space. In Oldenburg's conception this strategy would be challenging.

middle class neighborhood where she lives. Her experience illuminates the possibility for making new social connections that inspires many community organizers to attempt door-to-door strategies:

I did find a lovely young couple that had just moved here, and they had little girls running around. It was blustery and cold and we wouldn't stand outside so they invited me in, and we had this long conversation about Ludlowville, about energy. It was a very good exchange. I found another [man] who recently moved into the neighborhood as a tenant. He told me he would consider being a volunteer to do something more in the neighborhood. [We talked] outside on his covered porch. It wasn't too cold out. I remember not being terribly uncomfortable, but we were standing the whole time. I felt like the time spent face-to-face with the people at their door was beneficial time for just the general goal of neighborhood connectedness.

Here Gabriella focused on her own experience as the organizer. She evaluates the outreach strategy for its ability to help her achieve her goals of "neighborhood connectedness." From Gabriella's reflection we hear about the positive outcomes that are possible from bringing her outreach to the public and private boundary. We may also notice that Gabriella does not explicitly discuss the issues of exclusion or inclusion that might be at play in these types of settings. Although she did not consider these dynamics, I was not surprised to hear a different story from organizers in other communities. From Anthony's account we begin to hear about the more challenging aspects of door-to-door outreach, particularly the subjective experience of standing on the doorstep of a stranger's home.

They are inside their house and you are outside, on the doorstep. They could have a dog. They could slam the door in your face. It's cold and it's wet, but you're trying to connect with someone and do this whole community building thing. Up at someone's door, you've got your ego on the line. They can check you out, so you have to be on your guard a little bit more. You stand to lose something. You need to quickly develop a relationship, a trust with them, and it's really hard to do.

Anthony hopes the door-to-door strategy would "build community." While both Gabriella and Anthony focus on their own experience, Anthony focuses more on the constraints that he felt such as his feelings of vulnerability, time limitations, physical dangers, and the lack of pre-established relationships. Yet his reflection begins with a stark reminder of the physical and social boundaries represented "on the doorstep." In his experience the organizer is "an outsider" and the resident was "at home." Anthony portrays the outside as "cold and wet" and dangerous. We are left with the sense that the organizer is taking "a risk" by taking their outreach efforts right up to the boundary where the home space meets the world outside. Even though Anthony was born and raised in Caroline, his narrative reflects a social disconnection with the residents he visited. Anthony may be experiencing the fragmentation within modern communities where many people do not belong to the same social networks, classes, or other groups as their neighbors.[32]

All of the organizers I interviewed lived in the community's where they

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[32] See Coles (2004) for a discussion of social and physical fragmentation in modern communities and Putnam (2000) for a comprehensive consideration of the decline in "social capital" in American community life.

organized. Each was both a resident and an organizer. In the next two reflections, Nancy and Cathy speak about the challenges of this outreach strategy from the perspective of a resident. Here we begin to hear explicitly about the power dynamics that may be experienced by residents when community organizers use a door-to-door approach. One important distinction to be aware of is that Nancy and Cathy are organizing in communities with higher rates of poverty then Anthony and Gabriella. First we turn to Nancy's reflection:

> *Homes are tricky especially in a mobile home park, [Residents] are very sensitive to the possibility that people might judge [them] on where [they] live. You're on that borderline of going too far. It feels like an invasion for them. You're going to face more rejection as far as people being like "No, get away."*

Nancy's overall organizing experience was situated in the local mobile home parks. She highlights the perspective of the residents themselves. She is doubtful of the potential for door-to-door outreach to bring positive "neighborhood connectedness." Her story focuses on the fear of judgment that low-income families may experience. Nancy reminds us of how the power difference between organizers and residents may be amplified when they make a surprise visit to a home. The encounter may in fact feel like an invasion of privacy and elicit defensive rejections. With a similar focus Cathy shares that:

> *It's the threat of having someone you don't know standing on your doorstep. It doesn't happen very much in Enfield. There is just not a lot of contact between*

people who are different. And to have someone show up at your door and not to be able to identify them, puts them into a specific group of things that you would perceive as threatening.

Cathy builds on an understanding and perspective of rural poor families similar to Nancy. Not only are the power relationships skewed so residents may feel judged or invaded, but the culture and lifestyles of rural families are not accustomed to unexpected visitors and strangers. In this context, anybody or anything that is out of the ordinary may be perceived as a threat. Although community organizers we heard from are generally working for the betterment of their communities, these reflections speak to the possibilities for increasing social connections, as well as the power differences and cultural diversity that challenge organizers in these boundary settings.

3.23 Themes

Through these short reflections we hear how community organizers experience being a recruiter, an outsider, and even an invader when doing door-to-door outreach. While in Gabriella's case she was able to make new neighborhood connections, when the other organizers traveled to the edge of their neighbor's territory they encountered rejection and defensiveness. Through these reflections we hear of organizers "standing" throughout their whole interaction with a resident, enduring weather and environmental factors, perceiving risks and benefits; invasion and invitation; connection and rejection. Each organizer experienced the work of door-to-door surveying

differently and through their stories we can begin to see how each experience was situated in a distinct set of personal, social, historical, and physical dimensions.

We may note how the environment plays a role in this strategy. Unlike outreach inside churches, community centers, and corner stores, this strategy plays out with the organizer "outside" and the resident "inside." Earlier Nancy described the beautiful weather of the Youth Fun Day, and Andrea mentioned the sun that filled Enfield diner. In those outreach settings residents and organizers were presumably both either inside or outside, together. By contrast, Anthony recalled the "cold [and] wet" experience of standing on a resident's doorstep, while the resident was apparently standing inside the comfort of their own house. Gabriella as well, made a point of how residents in her neighborhood invited her inside when the weather was too "blustery and cold." While the weather was apparently equally unpleasant the residents in each case made different choices. Anthony was kept out, while Gabriela was invited in.

In one case the weather and the response of a family combined to invite Gabriella into the actual home. A "long conversation [and]… good exchange" followed. Although Gabriella describes both encounters in a positive light, all the parties remained standing throughout both interactions as if in limbo between staying out and coming in. Even inside their home the host individuals did not appear to offer the organizer a seat inside their home. Yet within this situation Gabriella managed to invite the two new families she encountered into the community's informal social network. In this case we can see how door-to-door outreach can function to bring people of a community together.

The three other organizers' experiences paint a different picture, where the defensiveness of the residents and the feeling of invasion may be too intense for community building to take place on the doorstep. Anthony speaks of both the constraints and the opportunity to "quickly develop a relationship, a trust with them." Anthony focuses on the constraints he feels, such as his "ego on the line", and the possibility that a dog might come after him, or door would be slammed on his face. Outreach in this situation appears to be an intensely personal experience for Anthony.

Cathy and Nancy focus more on their assumptions about the fears of the residents, then speaking to their own fears. Residents may feel judged, threatened and invaded. The result would be "more rejection." Both reflections remind us of the vulnerability of low-income, rural residents in mobile home parks, and the cultures of farming communities where there is less contact between families because of distance between the homes. Although the goals of the organizers may be to increase community connections, Cathy and Nancy are skeptical that door-to-door outreach would be effective in overcoming these constraints within these particular communities. Perhaps the open fields or corner stores are better sites for engaging people in these communities then approaching them unexpectedly at their doorstep.

In these narratives, outreach at the boundary of private and public spaces was initiated with the hope of communication and connection across the divides of these communities. As Anthony explains, "its really hard to do." The narratives paint a picture where both the insider and the outsider can be scared of the "other." Both sides are vulnerable. The insider may feel judged or invaded, and the outsider may also feel judged or intimidated. Egos

are on the line. Doors could be slammed in your face. We may wonder who really "stands to lose something?" if the efforts to "do this whole community building thing" fail. Everyone involved may have something to lose in these situations.

Similar to their accounts of planning spaces, these stories and reflections of outreach describe the subtle physical qualities, emotional experiences, personal choices, histories, and social relationships that intersect within their experiences. The narratives communicate both the frustration of repeatedly encountering unexpected constraints and the wonder of finding sites that can be a platform to introduce new ideas and ways of life to the community. Not surprisingly when organizers move away from their familiar meeting spaces, and into new and different spaces of the community, they encounter new dimensions of power and space that are hard to predict but are sometimes found to yield positive results.

3.24 Conclusion

These accounts of Heating Solutions organizers have portrayed a broad diversity of experiences situated in space and place. The goal of this chapter was to tease out the prominent themes that emerged from the entire set of accounts. At first glance we can see that organizers used a wide variety of settings across their communities for planning meetings and public outreach. Planning meetings among organizers occurred in homes, town halls, and business offices. Public outreach efforts engaged residents at youth events, fish fries, food pantries, diners, corner stores, and the doorsteps of homes.

Across these varied and distinct settings each account also highlighted the complexity of the organizer's personal experiences in these particular places. In the "Themes" sections a variety of these topics were highlighted. Tables, inclusion, exclusion, and authority were prominent topics in the accounts of planning meetings in formal spaces such as town halls and business offices. The accounts from planning meetings in homes, where organizers hosted meetings for each other, seemed to focus more on comfort, food, bonding, and informality. I was struck by the apparent differences between the uses and experiences of these distinct settings. Although common sense would suggest that courtrooms and living rooms are obviously different, I did not anticipate the complexity of feelings, histories, relationships, choices, and power dynamics associated with each setting.

When we turned to the accounts of outreach that occurred in businesses, events, and homes, new sets of themes emerged. The accounts from the fish fry, food pantry, and Youth Fun Day highlighted visibility, histories of the location, diversity of audiences, the importance of set up, and the pace of the event. Mood, conversation, food, neutral settings, gathering places, and central location were more prominent themes in the stories and reflections on outreach in the diner and the corner store. Perhaps the most interesting section detailed the accounts of outreach at the doorsteps of homes. Here organizers reflected on a sense of invasion, the risks of encroaching on private boundaries, the weather element, and interactions between people while standing. Again my attention was drawn to the interactions between the personal, historical, social, and spatial dimensions of these accounts.

The themes that emerged from across these accounts are illustrative of the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of how organizers experience

the spaces and places where planning meetings and outreach take place in their communities. Since the research was exploratory, by design the identification and analysis of these diverse themes were central goals. The following chapter analyzes the themes further and considers them in light of earlier research. The full set of themes is broken into five areas including: emotions and personal meaning, power, transformation of everyday places, and world traveling. Each area is explored separately and then reconsidered as a whole in the conclusion. In future research, scholars can probe deeper into specific details of these experiences. These stories and the themes identified may also be useful as teaching tools for training community organizers. In training settings on the spatial dimensions of organizing, such accounts can be read and analyzed by groups. They do not fit together to form a singular truth about reality. Instead, the accounts provide scholars and practitioners powerful, and varied, truths that can help us reflect on the spatial dimensions of community organizing.

Chapter Four: Organizing as a Spatial Practice

4.1 Introduction

Modern American communities are often fragmented and deeply divided. By community I mean a physical setting for relations, a population, and a cultural way of life. Today communities are falling apart, breaking apart and at times are torn apart.[1] Americans can hardly recognize the experience of the neighbor who lives just around the corner. Class, ethnicity, gender, age, lifestyle, and many other splintered identities dominate our narrow sense of community. The social capital and inclusive public spaces necessary to generate a broader sense of solidarity and community across these divisions are declining.[2] Community organizers, like the Heating Solutions organizers we have heard from, begin to bridge these abysses through the work of bringing people together in particular spaces and places to deal with pressing issues such as the current energy crisis.[3] True to their title they are organizing community.

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[1] See Agnew's (1989; 10) review of community as a space and culture in "The devaluation of place in social science."

[2] Putnam's (2000) classic work on the decline of social capital lays out many possible reasons for and impacts of the loss of social bonding. Carr et al. (1992) and Oldenburg (1997) discuss the impacts of a decline in locally controlled public spaces that support dialogue, social cohesion, and even grassroots democracy.

[3] Romand Coles (2003; 697) describes the modern world we inhabit today as places where power and difference inscribe nearly every inch of settled places. We often are socially and spatially fragmented into "gated oblivions" where deep "abysses" differentiate the experiences of people "located very differently just minutes apart." In order to effectively and humanely communicate with other people in public realms, community organizers often cross these abysses to the spaces and places of the 'other'. "It is often nearly impossible to hear well another person or group of people if you have not spent time in their very different spaces." Coles recognizes there are no neutral spaces for communication and even imagining such places "greatly obscures and possibly undermines the task at hand."

Generally, theoretical considerations and practitioner-oriented

literature on community organizing focus on the relational, communicative,

historical, and resource dimensions of this work. In particular, the work of the

Industrial Areas Foundation has moved relational organizing to the front of

the debate.[4] Alternatively, the narratives of organizers in the last chapter

compel us to re-imagine organizing as much more. The accounts richly

illustrate how the work of planning meetings and outreach is situated within

thick, interactive webs of emotions, personal meaning, relationships, history,

space, and ecology.

Although most writing on organizing is appropriately focused on social

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[4] The 'relationship' and 'communication' bias was identified through a review of over 12 practitioner guides used by the Tompkins County Cooperative Extension office, and a review of writings on the Industrial Areas Foundation, and other well documented community organizing efforts. Lefebvre (1991) explains how a cultural "illusion", the ideology of speech, imagines space to be "transparent" and a fairly neutral stage for social activities. "Western 'culture' … stresses speech, and overemphasizes the written word [through an] ideology of speech. It was on the basis of this ideology [of speech] that people believed for quite a time that a revolutionary social transformation could be brought about by means of communication alone.

Yet early in the 20th century progressive female political scholar, Hannah Arendt, portrayed the public realm as a stage, an illuminated space of appearances, appropriate for communicative action between people and the development of public relationships, and political power (Habermas 1994). Public spaces are stages where power is built between people through communication and relationship. In contrast to private, intimate, and isolated spaces such as the home or personal enterprise, the public spaces of a community are characterized by communication, relationship, plurality, and political power. Arendt's democratic ideal of legitimate political authority regulated by equitable public participation, was conceptualized as a "system of public spaces that are genuinely open at the bottom…protect[ed] public spaces from those ensconced in private passions and interests" (Coles 2006; 558).

In agreement with Arendt, Jurgen Habermas later emphasized the value of the public sphere for communication and deliberation on communal concerns. Recently scholars have been critical of the exclusionary implications of conceptualizing a singular public realm. Rather than a singular "public sphere" historically ruled by white men, critical scholars conceptualize a series of diverse "publics" (plural) where communicative deliberation, and relationship building can occur across lines of power and difference. Power is not only built in the reading rooms and clubs of elite society but also on street corners, local gathering places, and other outdoor sites accessible to a variety of classes, ages, genders, and races. (Ryan 1992).

dimensions, in order to understand the full complexity of community

organizing, we must look deeply into how the practice of bringing people

together is spatially situated. In this chapter our attention focuses on the

themes distilled from the accounts presented, in the light of relevant literature.

Through this approach we consider the spatial dimensions of community

organizing. An effort is made to widen our understanding of organizing, to

see this practice as more then relational. Organizing can be viewed as a spatial

practice as well. Through the practice of community organizing, people

interact within specific spaces and places. They are not sitting at metaphorical

and de-contextualized "tables".[5] As Giddens contends, "all social interaction is

situated interaction – situated in space and time" (1983; 86. Italics in original).

Although the organizers I interviewed rarely came to me ready to talk

about the spatial dimensions of their work, when I inquired their responses

revealed that space and place mattered in a variety of ways. They spoke about

how the spaces and places where they worked influenced emotions and

feelings, the ability to build trusting relationships, comfort levels, and power-

full experiences of inclusion and exclusion. In their efforts, choices about what

spaces to use and how to use them were common. Space and place were a

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[5] Within the context of spatial 'under-theorization', when space is considered it is either
reduced to the 'real or materialist' spaces of economics, topography, and geography, or the
'imagined or idealized' spaces of psychology, politics, sociology, and the arts. In most studies
by political scientists and sociologists on people working together in communities we hear of
"interface situations" (Long 1989), "planning tables" (Wilson 1999), "open spaces for
empowerment" (Stein 1997), "decision-making space" (Crawley 1998), "encounter horizons,
battlefields of knowledge" (Kesby 2005), and "paradoxical space" (Rose 1993). Often these
metaphorical terms that refer to social, cultural, political, and institutional settings do not
appropriately integrate the real, materialist notions of space with the socially constructed or
'imagined spaces' of subjective experience. In fact this split between real and imagined spaces
relates to the tension between the broadly characterized 'subjectivist' and 'objectivist'
approaches to science.

dynamic and interactive element of the context where their work unfolded. In these places and spaces people became more human. The work became more real. As Nancy explained to me during her interview: "being face to face makes a huge difference, and it really 'ties people in' a lot better than just doing a phone call or an email. It's where people start to relate to each other and recognize you as a real person."

Across all of the interviews with Heating Solutions organizers around Tompkins County, I heard about their involvement in two activities common to community organizers, planning meetings and community outreach efforts. From the narratives, we heard about planning meetings in formal settings such as courtrooms, community centers, conference rooms, and in intimate spaces such as living rooms, and front porches. We also learned about community outreach at local events, businesses, and the doorsteps of people's homes. From the rich descriptions of what happened in these spaces, we are able to notice patterns of community organizing practice.

The spaces and places of their planning meetings and outreach were not simply physical, material locations. They were sites of emotion, interaction, power, and meaning making. When organizers brought people together for a planning meeting or took their work to public events and homes to engage other residents, they attempted to open up and claim, to "carve out" as Rachel described, new real and imagined spaces, for what Anthony called "this whole community building thing."[6]

In order to understand the complexity of these accounts, the work of

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[6] Foucault (1984; 252) proposed that "space is fundamental in any exercise of power" and that making available, claiming, and taking up spaces need to be seen as acts of power, but…not always about the exercise of power over others." Community organizers in this context are acting through space to exercise and build democratic powers with people in their communities.

sociologist Benno Werlen, author of *Society, Action and Space: An Alternative Human Geography*, is useful. Werlen proposes an "action-oriented social geography [that] focuses on the embodied subject…in the context of specific socio-cultural, subjective, and material conditions" (1993; 3). For Werlen, the concept of space provides a "pattern of reference" and is only one of several dimensions. In line with Gidden's notion of structuration, Werlen's action-orientation stresses that, "materiality becomes meaningful in the performance of action with certain intentions" (1993: 4). Werlen also supported the premise of Henri Lefebvre's earlier work on space (1991) that any space that is at all meaningful and of consequence to people is a product of human action, i.e. the physical world becomes meaningful through spatial practices. All human action is then a spatial practice, a performance that intertwines the material and the imagined, the subjective and the objective.

Crucial to our understanding of the spatial dimensions of community organizing is a movement beyond the duality of the real and imagined, beyond the modern dualism between subjective and the objective conceptions of human activity.[7] Werlen's approach to social inquiry moves us toward the adoption of postmodern, non-dualistic notion of "thirdspace" (Soja 2003). Thirdspaces are more than the sum of real and imagined spaces. Thirdspaces are not simply material locations plus socially constructed spatial imaginaries

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[7] Through the seminal work "The Passion of the Western Mind" (1991), Richard Tarnas expounds on the long history in 'the west' of dualistic worldviews. Often 'dualism' refers to the polarization of the physical body from the physical world, and the body from the mind. (p. 132) Today in the field of social inquiry this dualism lives in the tensions between objectivity and subjectivity. Throughout this dynamic 'western' history non-dualistic alternatives have been suggested. Over the later half of the 20th century, historians (Berry 1999), anthropologists (Bateson 1979), biologists (Wilson 1999), geographers (Soja 2003) have called for a re-consilience of this ancient dualism. Through these writers I was able to unravel how the 'dualistic' assumptions of western culture may impede our understanding of community organizers.

such as social space or planning table. Thirdspaces are political and practical, real-world experiences and choices that draw on both the real and imagined. These are the creative actions situated in both real and imagined realms of life. Similar to Lefebevre's earlier notion of spatial practice, the making of thirdspaces achieves the integrative, recombination of the subjective and objective.

In the context of community organizing, the narratives explored earlier draw our attention to the "spatial practice" of Heating Solutions organizers. Through planning meetings and outreach they were "opening up new terrain, finding new sites of … critical dialogue." (Soja 1991; 199). The notion of spatial practice helps us view community organizing as a spatially situated practice that can help "open up and claim" spaces for their purposes of improving their communities. This 'spatial' frame for community organizing is apparent when we ask practitioners and organizers themselves about where they do their work, and how they experience these settings. From this ground level where community organizing occurs, the narratives of organizers describe the complex integration of the real and imagined sites where emotion, personal meaning, power, history, relationships, and choices intersect.

4.2 Emotions and personal meaning

Nearly 30 years ago Christopher Alexander's classic work, *A Pattern Language* (1977) presented how the patterns of spatial arrangement, inhabitation, and many other elements of a place have definite links to strong emotional

experiences in those places. In the previous chapters, we heard organizers speak about the "formality" of courtrooms that alienated them, and the "comfort" of living rooms that welcomed them. Through Anthony's narrative we heard of his "anger" at the "authority table" and the history of exclusive decision-making done at this table. Nancy as well felt "invasive" when attempting to "reach across the gap" of the doorstep to engage residents in their homes.

From other portions of the narratives we heard about how a diner, an open field, and two living rooms were "comfortable" places where honest and creative conversations could occur. In some cases, the emotional experience changed as new routines for using these everyday places were established. Rachel only felt "comfortable" after establishing a routine of engaging residents who walked by her table within the food pantry. Cathy from Enfield also explained to me how, "You sort of gain your comfort level after a while if you use the same space over and over and over again." Beyond any momentary emotional experience, her words reflect the ways that one's experience can change dramatically through repeated visits to the same space. Over time, she continues, "it really affects how in the end you start to view yourself."

The human experience of space is often grounded in the visceral, sensory experience allowed by our external and internal senses. This "built-in ability" allows us to create personal meaning from a direct, multi-sensory experience with a place and it's many physical and social dimensions. [8] A critical component of spatial practice in the narratives was the subjective,

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[8] In the introduction to *The Experience of Place*, Hiss (1990) provides an overview of how human senses are a pathway for the experience of place to impact the individual (pg. xi-xii).

personally meaningful, emotion-filled experiences of the organizers themselves, and the residents they engaged, within particular settings. Hiss (1990; xi) suggests that "our ordinary surroundings have an immediate and continuing effect" on feelings, actions, our sense of self, our sense of safety, the kind of work we get done, our interactions with others, and even our ability to function as citizens in a democracy. Hiss continues, "Places where we spend our time affect the people we are and can become" (p. xi-xii). Spaces and places can stimulate strong associations with our own past experiences and psychological associations, which in turn help create the meaning of the situation.[9]

Another organizer I interviewed, whose full narrative was not explored earlier, summed up how personal experiences of spaces and places are of practical importance to community organizers. This organizer had worked with low-income rural residents through social service organizations for many years. When describing how space mattered in her practice she explained how, "Space is a big thing in affecting how people feel. People probably feel most comfortable at their homes rather than if I asked somebody from [a

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[9] In *Public Spaces*, Carr et al. (1992) describe how people may create meaning of spaces and places. See Werlen (1993) for a overview of the phenomenological work of Schutz that provides additional support to understand the importance of subjective and emotional experiences of community organizing. Schutz focused on the experience of the living body and accentuated the process of 'inter-subjective understanding' that characterizes the relationship between individuals and the material and 'life-worlds'. According to Schutz's conception of 'intersubjective-understanding' the individual does not have objective knowledge of material space and biological life outside themselves, they only have subjective, partial knowledge. Only through intersubjective-understanding can individuals (plural) collectively approach increasingly useful knowledge of the world and themselves. As a result of this conception Schutz emphasizes interaction; the spatial encounters between individuals as they interact with the life-world to collaboratively generate knowledge and meanings, and take actions.

mobile home park] to come down here [to the organization's main office] and meet me in this interview room so we can talk about energy… they probably wouldn't be so open to coming down and coming into this room and talking to me."

Subjective, emotion-filled experiences are seen to have a direct influence on how an organizer engages a local resident. The subjective experiences within these spaces, the emotions and feelings of the organizers and local residents, are an indication that these locations are not neutral territory. These spaces and places where planning meetings and outreach took place were deeply meaningful to all the people involved, presumably in a variety of ways dependent on their personal histories and psychological associations. These subjective experiences emerged from the narratives not only as reflections on emotions, but as clues to see how these spaces are filled with histories of social relationships. The "interview room" mentioned above was not only a physical location that stimulated sensory responses and meaning-making, but it was also the site of social relationships.

4.3 Power

One way that social relationships and social histories can be understood in this context is to see how power is alive and imprinted within these spaces.[10]

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[10] The work of Foucault on the de-centered and spatial nature of power helps situate the spatial practice of community organizing within appropriately "spatial" considerations of power. Over 30 years ago Michael Foucault proposed that power of every kind is essentially 'action in space'. Power is not merely an abstract relationship or structural property of social systems. Power takes place in and through the spatial dimensions of our world including geographic, ecological, and built environments. In contrast to traditional theorizations of power which locate power within the centralized regimes of feudal, patriarchal, and class-based control, Foucault proposed power as radically decentralized, "acting everywhere

Andrea, a Heating Solutions organizer, explained in her interview; "A space has an impact on who's an insider, [and] who's an outsider." Indeed, the narratives revealed several ways that the spaces and places used for planning meetings and outreach were deeply weathered by the history of inclusion and exclusion that had unfolded in these places.[11] When critical social geographers have written about the interactions between power and space, they tend to focus either on power *over* others and exclusive spaces, and power *with* others and inclusive spaces.[12]

In Anthony's case, his description of the "table of authority" and the table's history are much more then spontaneous experiences of a material object, such as a table. In a similar way Nancy's narrative surfaced her experience with the throne-like desk in the mobile home park manager's office. Anthony and Nancy may be reflecting on the ways in which histories of power, alive in the spaces themselves, influence their experience of the current planning meetings. Their narratives point to how the experience of a town hall or manager's office may even constrain the potential for dialogue, often cited

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because it comes from everywhere … dispersed throughout the complex networks of discourse, practices, and relationships that position subjects as powerful and that justify and facilitate their authority" (Clegg 1989; 207) Through a 'de-centering' of power, Foucault was able to show the ways that power is constantly alive in the actions and spaces of people's everyday lives, and not only within spatial centers of power such as castles, churches, and prisons. (Kesby, 2006).

[11] In The Production of Space (1991) Lefebvre proposes that space is "inscribed" with the practices of power in social relations including class-base, familial, gender and other modes of social organization and hierarchy. Lefebvre also writes of how space embodies social relationships.

[12] Kesby (2005) explains that although violent and coercive ruling groups often use power *over* people, building power *with* people was also possible and necessary for people to work together in communities. Kesby also draws a strong correlation between inclusive spaces where diverse groups can come together, and the ability to build power with these people. Sibley (1995) provides an excellent example of this correlation between power over others and exclusion in *Geographies of exclusion: Society and difference in the west.*

as a critical mode of communication, to occur in this planning meeting.[13]

In both Anthony's and Nancy's narrative we heard of how these experiences of "tables of authority" and "thrones" communicated who was included and who was excluded from decision making in these settings. In a more subtle way, Rachel's experience in the church fish fry, where she could not find a space for outreach within the busy church hallway, hints at the possibility that spaces can feel exclusive without such dramatic encounters with emotionally charged spatial arrangements.

Unlike the mobile home park office and the Caroline town hall, Andrea brought people together for "good conversations" in the corner store, the village hall, and the diner. Andrea chose to use places that "belonged to everybody." She described how any local resident, from any class or background, could show up in the diner and would be welcomed. Her experience of these places speaks to the possibility for inclusion of different groups within "great, good" gathering places. Nancy's description of the Youth Fun Day also highlighted the possibility for "many different groups" to come together in the neighborhood's central field.

In consideration of these issues the classic studies of "social encounters" by Goffman (1952) helps us situate power and social relationships squarely in the bodies of people in actual places. Goffman's analysis of the routines of "everyday life" focused on the micro-level social interactions of life. Goffman proposed that the public spaces within any given community came alive through "face-to-face encounters" between people in the context of "social occasions" (Giddens discussing Goffman 1984; 71). Social occasions,

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[13] See Hinchman & Hinchman (1994) and Boyte (2004) for a discussion of the limitations of Arendt's and Habermas' ideal communication situations.

such as the planning meetings and outreach work described earlier, are characterized by the presence of a plurality of individuals, "positioning" themselves in relationship to their own bodies, each other, the physical space, and the broader physical and imagined life-world. Positioning in this sense is a situated performance of power.[14] The movement of the human body through space (including gesturing, making facial expressions, sitting down on a couch, standing across a table, and much more), and the simultaneous 'positioning' of the self within broader social constructions of identity (including class, gender, race, culture, and other socially constructed systems of differentiation) are socially, temporally, and spatially situated performances.[15]

For example, in her narrative Cathy identified herself as a newcomer to Enfield. She also felt excluded from the grapevine at the corner store. She believed that this experience was directly related to how long she had been in the community, and how often she visited the corner store. She said, "If you want to know gossip, that's the place to go. Of course when I walk in everyone stops and looks at me. They have no idea who I am, so I don't learn anything

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[14] Following from a similar orientation to the interaction between spatially situated encounters and the social positioning of identity, feminist scholar Judith Butler built on Goffman's conception of performance through a theory of 'performativity'. Nelson (1999) discusses how Butler's original conception implied that people are subjects with little or no conscious reflexivity. Consequently Butler's non-reflexive subjects reenacted historically and socially pre-determined identities of powerlessness (often in the case of women and other marginalized groups), or identities of powerfulness (often in the case of men and other elites). Since Butler, 'performance' has been re-imagined. Today, we find scholars who use performance to describe the activities of self-reflexive people who are both performing their traditional identities e.g. poor, white, and female, while also integrating "new practices of empowerment", as described by Kesby (2004), and "cultural resistance", as described by hooks (1990), into the performance. When community organizers bring together diverse people in public spaces to build relationships, according to Kesby and hooks, they are in affect creating new spatially situated 'social occasions' where performances of both newly empowered and historical identities can occur.
[15] See Giddens (1984; 84)

good. You know I think I'd have to show up every day for a couple of months before I started getting included in the gossip." In this sense, the exclusion that she experienced in this particular place relates both to how she physically moved through the corner store, physically interacted with other residents, and her identity within the community.

The experiences within community spaces elicited emotions, helped form meaningful experiences, and pointed to ways that histories of power relations had taken shape in space, and were alive throughout their communities. There are a number of theorists and writers whose perspectives on these spatially situated dimensions of organizing have been useful to tease apart the complex intersections that have been surfaced throughout this research. The view of community organizing as a spatial practice has many facets. These first two sections focused on what organizers felt and the power dynamics they experienced. Now we turn to the ways that organizers can shape the spaces and places of their communities through their own choices and movements.

4.4 Transforming everyday places

Throughout this chapter we have slowly unfolded ways that community organizing is a complex spatially situated practice that involves emotions, personal meanings, relationships, communication, power, and much more. The organizer's narratives reviewed earlier help us see how the everyday spaces and places of our communities are locations where the real and imagined dimensions of life intersect. Although the spaces and places we

heard about are themselves fascinating sites to explore, the intentions and actions of the organizers themselves remain to be explored. As discussed above, Werlen (1993:4) proposed that, "materiality becomes meaningful in the performance of action with certain intentions." With this in mind, let us briefly review the intentions of the organizers in order to better understand their purposes for using spaces and places in the ways they have described.

When we look back to the narratives we find that each organizer revealed their intentions for social and environmental change in their communities:

Nancy shared that she hopes: "the community is getting more connected and actually communicating with each other more…and recognize that they have that ability to control their environment even though it seems pretty hopeless to them at time."

Anthony told us: "The project is helping the environment and it's helping our neediest people. You're building networks that can then be used later on."

Andrea explained that: "When things fall apart people help each other. If we had networks, if we knew each other, it would be easier. So I decided to start building some networks in Freeville that were stronger than the loose connections that I had, and that weren't based on the church. What we really want to grow is citizen engagement."

For Rachel: "There was a pretty strong element just of community building in general. We hoped to have more people talking about energy issues, and to create a forum for people to share their skills."

While Gabriella told us: "We wanted to engage the grassroots in a way that not only brought information about energy efficiency into people's hands,

but would also build social networks that would be available when the next crisis arose, whether that might be avian flu or some kind of terrorist attack."

And Cathy shared: "To better the children's lives it's also important to do what you can to support the families. So we have gotten into energy conservation in the last year because of the rising price of gasoline and fuel oil. By starting with something that people really care about like energy, it's possible then to extend it to something else like education and literacy programs."

As we work with the themes from these narratives to help us explore community organizing as a spatial practice it remains important to keep these intentions in mind. In the section to follow we focus on the situated actions, or spatial practice, of the organizers as detailed in the narratives, and consider the different ways that the Heating Solutions organizer choose to act in a variety of situations. Earlier the concept of thirdspace was described as the political and practical, real-world choices and creative actions situated at the intersection of real and imagined spaces.

Rachel's narrative hints at her awareness of this possibility when she said, "It is less about the space itself…but more about how we placed ourselves within that space." Gabriella's narrative went further to say that what matters about space and place "depends on the task at hand." From these two perspectives we may begin to see how everyday spaces such as food pantries, living rooms, and town halls are made meaningful through the choices and actions that people make to create change in their communities. The question then becomes how to describe the practical and political choices and actions that organizers, and other people, make that help situate them

(personally, socially, historically, and physically) within particular spaces and places.

A valuable example of social theory from the feminist and critical traditions that has considered this question of space and political choice are the writings of bell hooks. She writes extensively about the political choices that people, who have been excluded from the democratic project in America, can make. One option is the choice to embrace the "margins" of society as both a real and imaginary site from where to critique and change American society. In her essay *Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness* she explains:

"Moving, we confront the realities of choice and location. Within complex and shifting realms of power relations, do we [black feminist intellectuals] position ourselves on the side of the colonizing mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed…toward that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space…where transformation is possible?" (hooks 1990; 145).

For hooks the edges of the public realm, outside of the ivory towers of academia, the private clubs of the elite, and hallways of official government buildings are the margins where women, people of color, and the working class can "open up and claim" spaces within everyday places such as corner stores, churches, diners, and living rooms. Through the choices these people make, they can find existing sites and create new ones where people can build power and relationships to transform their own social and political marginalization. In the light of hooks' work we begin to see community

organizing as a practice that can transform the margins; the street corners of low-income neighborhoods, the living rooms of rural women, the diners in agricultural communities, into sites of "creativity and power", "inclusive space… [that] offers to one the possibility… to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds." (hooks 1990; 150).

Limited research on "free spaces" provides another useful lens to tease apart the spatial dimensions of community organizing.[16] In addition, research on the practice of participatory community development within post-colonial nations including Cornwall (2004) and Kesby (2005) is particularly informative in its descriptions of how community organizers use space and place at the margins to build power and transform community situations.

Evans and Boytes' original work entitled 'Free Spaces' (1985) proposed that the opening up and claiming of public spaces and places was essential to grassroots and inclusive democracy in America. The title was inspired by Pamela Allen (1970) who first used the term 'free space' in a short pamphlet on the small group discussions within the women's liberation movement. Beginning in the early 20th century, women in the temperance movement gathered in homes because that was one of the few female free spaces. (Evans and Boyte 1986; 91) Later in the century, during the feminist movement, women would gather in circles for small group discussions through which they would discover that their personal experiences were shared. Feminist free spaces were sites liberation and power created through political choices

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[16] Literature on "free spaces" includes Evans and Boyte (1986), King & Hustedde (1993), Delagado and Barton (1998), Polletta (1999), and Christmas (1999), While 'free space' research has approached the importance of space from an emphasis on democracy and social change, there is a large body of literature which indirectly supports their claims from geography including Buttimer and Seamon (1981), Agnew & Duncan (1989), Shields (1991), Massey (1994), Sibley (1995), Massey, Allen & Share (1999), Harvey (2001); psychology including Hiss (1990), Gallagher (1993), and anthropology Hall (1966) and Tuan (1977)

about how to use space.

Other examples of free spaces were black churches during the civil rights movement, and the meeting sites of early labor organizers and women suffragists. Evans and Boyte proposed that the creation of these 'free spaces' was essential for building power within politically progressive social movements of the last 200 years. Free spaces are "settings between private lives and large scale institutions with a relatively open and participatory character" (p.ix). They "can be found in any social setting where people have the room to own their own political actions…where people become transformed from private actors…to public agents, able to understand themselves in terms of their impact on the larger world." (p xii-xiii).[17] Is it possible that Heating Solutions organizers were trying to create such "free spaces" within the everyday places of their own communities?

Since Evans and Boyte, several scholars of democracy, collective action, and community organizing have advanced the 'free space' concept. Delgado and Barton (1998) located more examples of the creation of free space in a variety of contemporary marginalized communities including beauty and barbershops, grocery stores, social clubs, inner city murals, and parks. Delgado and Barton emphasized, "the question is not whether they [free spaces] exist but how they are manifested in the community" (p 347).

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[17] The theoretical position of 'Free Space' was similar to Soja's 'thirdspace.' Evans and Boyte used the term "space" to "suggest the lived, daily character of those networks and relationships that form the primary base of social movements … it suggests strongly an 'objective' physical dimension… and a subjective dimension, space as understood, perceived, and lived." (p 18). These arguments situated the practice of building and maintaining democracy, the practice of building power with people in communities, clearly within the everyday real and imagined spaces of public life. Additionally Evans and Boyte claimed that understanding the "nature and function" of free spaces was "indispensable to an adequate understanding of the process of social change" (p xxvi).

Free spaces are not immobile or static locations. [18]They are spaces within everyday places that people can open up, claim, and transform through political choices such as those described by Soja and hooks.

These literatures on transformational margins and free spaces begin to shed light on how to describe the spatially-situated choices and actions detailed in the narratives of Heating Solutions organizers. Worth noting though, these literatures are heavily reliant on political science and they do not emphasize the emotional dimension and the situated performances of identity that emerged from the narratives. We explored these other dimensions earlier with theoretical work from phenomenology, cultural anthropology, and social psychology.

While these three sections have pulled away and examined many layers we are still without any detailed consideration of how organizers create

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[18] Further research by Christmas (1999) demonstrates how 'free spaces' are not neutral settings for 'transformation' and democratic action, but can in fact reconfigure and perpetuate patriarchy, classism, and racism. In these cases we see how free spaces are not ideal spaces, but also real sites where power and exclusion may be reconfigured and transformed, but not always eliminated or purified. If community organizers are engaged in opening up and claiming free spaces, the question of how they are uniquely manifested within every new community context remains.

   In reviewing over 15 years of research on 'free spaces' and related spatial concepts, social movement theorist Francesca Polletta (1999) identified several types of free spaces based on the qualities of the social relationships that are embedded in these sites including transmovement, indigenous, and prefigurative free spaces. 'Indigenous free spaces' are particularly useful for our consideration of the current narratives. Indigenous free spaces are those sites that community organizers often identify when first initiating a project within a specific community.

   These are real places where residents in a community already gather for a variety of informal social occasions and have not been established for the primary use of building power such as a training center or organizational office. These include the traditional corner stores, living rooms, barbershops, parks, and other sites within a given community, and the social activities that are carried on within them. If and when the community faces acute social and political crisis these sites offer the transformative platforms for private citizens to perform public and collective actions. Indeed when oil and gas prices began to soar, and low-income families in Tompkins County, New York were struggling with the high prices, we heard how Heating Solutions organizers began to use places for planning meetings and outreach that we could consider "indigenous free spaces."

or embellish free spaces.[19] If indeed Heating Solutions organizers were creating or embellishing free spaces to advance their social change goals, what did this creative work look like? What details and nuance do the narratives tell us about community organizers creating and embellishing free spaces? You may not be surprised to learn that it begins with movement.

4.5 World traveling

In a section of her interview not included in the earlier narratives Gabriella told me about a community space that she often used for bringing people together for community events, "The Rod and Gun Club which we use, is those boys. You know those Lansing boys. And every time we use it we're like "[smell] those cigarettes and greasy hamburgers and beer. It's not our space." It sounds as though Gabriella knows when she is not on home turf. She has traveled to "those boy's" turf. She and her colleagues apparently dislike the smell of the rural working class: the cigarettes, hamburgers, and beer. Other people enjoy those things, not her. Yet there she was, using "those boy's" space to achieve her own goals and objectives for social change.

Various groups in her community appear to have territory and as a community organizer she has chosen to cross over those lines.[20] To cross those lines Gabriella presumably needed to travel from her own territory, into "those Lansing boy's" territory. As we will see in the following section, the

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[19] See King and Hustedde (1993) for rich descriptions of how organizers can "embellish existing free spaces" and "create new free spaces."

[20] Edward Hall in *The Hidden Dimension* (1966) writes at length about the value of understanding the spatial dimensions of human culture. The territory of one's own cultural group, and the territory of the "other", are major themes discussed throughout that work.

practice of traveling into other's territory, and inviting other's to come onto your own, emerges from across the Heating Solutions narratives and other research on community organizers. If we envision community organizing as a spatial practice, we begin to see how Heating Solutions organizers traveled between the many fragmented territories of their communities. As they traveled they rewove new patterns from the tattered and torn pieces of community that they found strewn across the landscape. Did their movements and choices help claim, open up, and transform the everyday places of the community? Did they create new free spaces and embellish existing ones throughout the diners, corner stores, living rooms, town halls, and churches of Tompkins County, New York? Hearing the accounts of organizers can inspire us to re-imagine community organizing as a much more then building relationships.

As we explore the movements and political choices of Heating Solutions organizers, the recent ethnographic research and theoretical writings of Romand Coles (2004) becomes helpful. His work presents one way to describe the spatially-situated practice of community organizing. While earlier research proposed that organizers can embellish existing free spaces and create new free spaces, Coles work allows for more nuanced thinking about community organizing as a spatial practice. [21] Through in-depth ethnographic research, in working class, racially diverse communities, on the practices of community organizers from the Industrial Areas Foundation, Coles integrates the many of dimensions of analysis covered previously (including democracy,

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[21] See King and Hestedde (1993) for rich descriptions of how organizers can "embellish existing free spaces" and "create new free spaces."

community organizing, social interaction, phenomenology, public space, and power). He explains his aim to:

> "re-envision the space-time of democratic engagement … toward a critical discussion of the limits of the imaginary of the solid democratic table that guides a lot of democratic theory… re-conceptualized more as an activity in which the tables of engagement…must be repeatedly *altered* through practices in which they are *moved and multiplied*" (p. 681 Emphasis in the original).

Drawing from feminist Maria Lugones, Coles describes the activities of organizers moving their own physical body, from their own spaces into the spaces of the other as, "literal body world traveling" (p. 688). Moving across segmented worlds of difference acts to produce "a fabric of spaces and times". Creating such a tapestry is a "basic condition" for inclusive decision making to emerge among the diversity of people within a broader community (p. 698). Through world traveling, organizers put themselves in the places of the other. At times the 'other' is in the margins, the ghetto church. In other moments the 'other' is in the center, the offices of political officials. In either case, the choice has been made to open up and claim this space for socially transformative purposes. In the process the organizer, along with the community, has an opportunity to be transformed. In reflection on his own field experiences Coles writes:

> "[organizing] work has put me in numerous meetings in very poor black neighborhoods… places I had never been before. It has put me in

basements of religious buildings in these neighborhoods, listening to

people speak and pray and sing and tell stories and work hard and

patiently toward justice, democracy, and power *from those places…*

world traveling bends, broadens, and nurtures one's hearing and

vision, and it transfigures the imagination as our bodies experience the

reverberations of music in strangely worn buildings, the textures of

worn doors, a patched broken window, buildings shedding paint and

sloping." (p689 emphasis in the original)

Coles proposes world traveling as a spatial practice that embodies

principles of "equality, justice, freedom, and democratic engagement." World

traveling is a practice that enables organizers, and the community members

they engage, to open up and claim real and imagined space in their struggle to

transform their communities. As we look back to the narratives of Heating

Solutions organizers they are filled with stories of "world traveling." Heating

Solutions organizers traveled into the informal spaces where people gathered

for eating and socializing, they traveled into the formal spaces where

managers and politicians made decisions, they traveled to the doorsteps of

their neighbors, and at times they invited other residents to travel into their

own private spaces and places.

Through world traveling the organizers brought people together to

dialogue and plan. In these places they listened to people's stories, shared

their own concerns, planned actions that could improve people's lives, and

recruited other residents to join the project.[22] We may begin to see how the

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[22] See Coles (2004) where he proposes the critical value of "listening" for community
organizers who are traveling into the spaces of the other. "It is often nearly impossible to hear

organizers and the everyday places of their communities, along with the residents they engaged, changed through the practice of world traveling, crossing territorial lines into the spaces of others. Their narratives recalled the spatially situated, emotion-filled, personally meaningful, and power-laden experiences.

Beyond world traveling, a spatial practice of community organizing, Coles pushes us to re-imagine Hannah Arendt's notion of a "solid" democratic table as a space for inclusive deliberations such as those described in the Heating Solutions' planning meetings.[23] If we focus on the political choices and movements of organizers, i.e. their actions, the static table comes alive. Table becomes the verb, "tabling." With this active image of the table, the work of organizing becomes the movement of the democratic table into new places. Tabling by community organizers can engage historically excluded people, within marginal places such as food pantries and rural diners, in the creation of free spaces where power *with* others can be developed.

Coles goes on to say, "As it [the table] travels, it morphs in the changed light and shadows of the neighborhood, feel of the room, cadence of the opening prayer" (p.695). Through the spatial frame we see how moving the dialogue from one location to another has the potential to de-center the work of building power, create new spaces for decision-making within the margins, and engender broader ownership among diverse groups. Within each new

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well another person or group of people if you have not spent time in their very different spaces" (p. 687).

[23] As first proposed by Arendt the life-world and its objects are like a table "which relates and separates all who are gathered around it… all who sit around it see what is on it from different perspectives"(Gottsegen 1994; 52) As such, Coles (2004) explains, the "solid…central table of fixed being and location" is both exclusive and inclusive space. In order to build democratic power, tables must "let themselves be moved and move us to very different spaces and modes of relation" (p694).

location, the "shadows" of that space, its inhabitants, and its history, casts a unique and "palpable" light on the interactions within its boundaries. As we recall the Heating Solutions narratives we hear even more details about the complexity of tabling in practice. Interestingly, organizers encountered in this research commonly referred to outreach work as "tabling" in an apparent reference to an actual table that usually accompanies them to display flyers and books.[24] Two examples of this particular common meaning were Rachel's experiences at the Fish Fry and Food pantries, and Nancy's experience in the central field of the mobile home park. In both cases they spoke about setting up tables in these places to both display information and discuss energy issues with residents. As we will see, tabling was much more then setting up a card table in a hallway to display information.

Through my own journey as a Heating Solutions organizer, I encountered several tables within planning settings that at first I simply took for granted. A table is a table, what does it have to do with building power with people? [25] Yet as the narratives show, tables were in fact a common feature in many of the narratives. In a variety of sites there was an actual table where people gathered to plan their community organizing efforts. For Anthony it was a "table of power and authority" in the town hall. For Nancy the manager's table created "distance" and "isolation."

The experiences around tables in these formal spaces were quite different from those in diners and living rooms. In Rachel's living room there was only a circle of chairs with "no central table." In Andrea's experience of the local diner everyone was sitting around a different table. The proximity of

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[24] The language of "tabling" in reference to outreach work has been consistent over my 9 years as an organizer in a variety of communities.
[25] See Coles (2004; 684)

these different tables to each other within the classic American diner scene made it possible for Andrea to have "mini-conversations with someone that would educate them." Perhaps the diner was the ideal location for tabling in this town, for Andrea explains that residents "would never come to a meeting you called about energy." If there was an issue to discuss, the tables of the diner were the best place. In this case, tabling in the diner was critical for engaging the public in the energy conversation. Andrea's strategy was explicitly grounded in space and relationship. She was aware of how the diner was a particular space that supports specific preferable types of dialogue that she could orient toward building relationships and concern about common energy issues.

In order for her "tabling" strategy to be effective, the diner needed to be a place where "nobody's an insider and nobody's an outsider", and "where the boundaries are down and people can talk to each other." Since her conversations in the diner were not a formal meeting, Andrea could educate community members through dialogue, or "plant a little seed", without "preaching" and "being in charge." The narrative reflects her acute awareness of how spaces can be used for preaching and being in charge. Her narrative tells of how the appropriate use of tabling could be an antidote to those authoritarian traditions. In this sense Andrea's choice to bring her form of tabling into the diner helped create a space where inclusive dialogue could occur. Perhaps she was embellishing the existing free space through the practice of bringing the "table of democracy" into the diner.

The narratives provide many examples of organizers bringing people together in various formal and informal places and initiating dialogue with strangers in the everyday gathering places around the community. They also

spoke of traveling to the doorsteps of residents. Organizers appeared to be tabling with residents at the edge of their home spaces through the common practice of canvassing or going "door-to-door." Anthony explained, "They are inside their house and you are outside, on the doorstep… trying to connect with someone and do this whole community building thing. You need to quickly develop a relationship, a trust with them, and it's really hard to do."

Unlike the inclusive character of the diner, at a stranger's doorstep everyone seems to be either an insider or an outsider. This unique version of tabling was used when organizers reached out across the private-public edge at the doorstep of a resident's home. This practice of tabling at the edge or "edging", as we will call it for lack of a better term, presented a new set of issues that organizers did not seem to encounter in town halls or corner stores. Nancy's reflection surfaced several of these issues, "You're on that borderline of going too far. It feels like an invasion for them. You're going to face more rejection as far as people being like "No, get away." Several narratives described how edging could be threatening and invasive, but may also have the unpredictable potential of meaningful connection between the organizer and resident. When tabling occurs at this "borderline", we hear that experiences can be intense for both organizers and residents in new ways.

The edge of the intimate home space and the public realm outside the home is a particular boundary space where edging may be difficult. David Sibley (1995) offers a perspective on this unique space. He tells us:

"The home may represent a space clearly separated from the outside. Inside the home, the owner or tenant may feel that space is ordered according to his or her values. However, entrances, breaches in the

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boundaries of the home, can create problems. The entrance, the hallway or passage provides a link between the private and the public, but it constitutes an ambiguous zone where the private/public boundary is unclear and in need of definition and regulation in order to remove the anxiety of the occupier… How do you cope with a Jehovah's Witness or a person selling double-glazing? The response will depend on where the householder locates the boundary, but this may be variable, depending on how the outsider is perceived in relation to the occupier's conception of privacy" (p. 33-34)

Sibley's analysis helps us understand the possibility of "rejection" that Nancy mentions, and was echoed in other reflections. Edging is clearly a challenging practice when we acknowledge how an "entrance" is an "ambiguous zone" where boundaries are unclear and "anxiety" is high. Organizers may be invading the householder's sense of privacy or even threatening their values. In Enfield, Cathy describes how the use of this boundary space is not appropriate for these purposes, "It's the threat of having someone you don't know standing on your doorstep. It doesn't happen very much in Enfield. There is just not a lot of contact between people who are different. And to have someone show up at your door, and not to be able to identify them, puts them into a specific group of things that you would perceive as threatening,"

From the accounts, organizers crossed into these boundaries between the private and public worlds without an invitation. The opportunity to create free spaces within these tense situations seemed rare. We might imagine a very different scene if the residents were expecting the organizers to visit.

Without such an invitation the resident might feel invaded, and subsequently reject the organizer before they can, as Anthony put it, "develop a relationship, some trust with them." On the other hand, when a group or individual opens their doors to the practice of tabling they become a welcoming host.

Hosting the table of democracy then becomes another version of tabling. People can invite the work of tabling into their own homes or other organizational establishments such as churches or businesses. This was the case in my own experience as a Heating Solutions organizer when a resident suggested that a small group come to her porch for a conversation about energy issues and to begin a planning process. Hosting seemed to have the exact opposite effect to edging. Opening a private space to bring people together may increase trust and build relationships. The hosts of each gathering act as a critical bridge between the physical space, the subjective experiences of the guests, and the social and historical significance of the event taking place in this location.

We heard more about hosting from Rachel when she invited residents into her own home for a small, intimate planning meeting. She spoke about her love of hosting and the particular space that her living room offered, "I love hosting meetings, so I really enjoyed it. I'm comfortable in my own space. As opposed to meeting in a more sterile or institutional environment, like the town hall, one person is lounging on the couch, and another one in the [lazy boy]… I feel more creative and more relaxed at meetings like that than I do when I'm sitting around a huge board table in a stiff chair… The living room is pretty eclectic. It's sort of a rugged lime green color. I painted the front of

the entertainment center with a big purple tree and a sun behind it. And there's painted lizards on the wall and some kind of funky things."

Rachel draws our attention to her own comfort and the particular qualities of her home that contrast with the town hall, and the "table of authority" that Anthony spoke about. She seems to believe everyone is more comfortable as well. Increasingly we may see how the physical space and the social relationships are interweaving. The living room is both a physical, real room with purple trees and lizards, and an imagined place of comfort where organizers can work together more creatively. The space is alive with feeling, interaction, meaning, and history. Coles (2004) described how the host's histories and traditions are "etched into these walls and floors…[their] stories still subtly reverberating in the corners of the room" (p. 695). Rachel's personal stories reverberate through the room as the planning meeting goes on. The act of hosting shines a new light on the democratic table in progress.

In this section the organizer's accounts have grounded Coles' analysis with voices from embodied experiences within the town halls, rural diners, and living rooms of Tompkins County. The notion of world traveling was useful for the emphasis on the work of simply moving one's body into and through a variety of community spaces. Movement across the spatially situated lines of power differences is seen as a crucial activity that enables relationships to form where fragmentation once stood. Furthermore, Cole's work elaborates how organizers can create and embellish free spaces through tabling, edging, and hosting. In each variation, the table of democratic engagement is moved through and into a variety of spaces and places. These three spatial practices were characterized by unique challenges and opportunities for the organizers who attempted them.

4.6 Conclusion

Without close attention to the situated-ness of organizing in space and place, the practices discussed throughout this work would have been mistakenly understand only in historical and social terms. Situating community organizing within a fuller context that includes the spatial dimension is a critical phase in our understanding of what organizers actually do. As we have seen, the landscapes where community organizers operate are more than real, material places (such as doors, chairs, rooms, streets, towns, mountains, oceans, etc) and settings described with social imaginaries (such as power, democracy, class, race, gender, etc). For this reason, the spatial practices used to navigate these landscapes exist at the intersection of the real and the imagined, the crossroads of the physical and the relational.

Additionally, the accounts from the Heating Solutions Project, alongside various theoretical conceptions, helped expose the interactions between emotion, personal meaning, power, and choice, situated in everyday spaces and places. But these considerations left us with more questions. How were the organizers' experiences of space and place influenced by personal histories and organizing goals? What elicited the emotional experiences that ranged from anger to safety? How are histories of power relations embedded in the spatial arrangements of different locations? How did community organizers make practical and political choices about using spaces and places to forward their agendas? Were organizers able to open up and claim new terrains, create and embellish free spaces, where alternative futures could be explored? Were organizers world traveling? Tabling, hosting, and edging? Are

these indeed useful notions to help describe the spatial practices of organizers? All of these questions remain as scholars and writers, concerned with community organizing, only now begin to look deeply at organizing as a spatial practice.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

We must change the world.
    We know where to go;
        Whom we must join with;
           How to behave;
              What really matters;
                Whom we must reach.
                  But how to begin?
                    Place is the place.

      -Phillip L. Wagner from *Each Particular Place: Culture and Geography (2000)*

First and foremost, this research emerged from my work as a community organizer. For this reason the conclusion will begin from my perspective as a community organizer who has been through a profound reconsideration of his craft. In this first section we look back on the many voices of organizers shared in this thesis and consider what they have taught us about how community organizers experience the everyday spaces and places of their communities. Next we will consider these stories and reflections from my perspective as a social researcher interested in the spatially situated aspects of community organizing. Lastly we look ahead toward ways that both practitioners and researchers can build on the traditions of relational organizing and participatory democracy by integrating social and spatial dimensions through a non-dualistic approach to research and practice.

5.1 Reflections on practice

Through the ethnographic field work and the accounts of community organizers I gathered from 'the streets' of the Heating Solutions Project, we

have learned about the work of a small group of volunteer organizers who had a variety of experiences in the rural spaces and places of upstate New York. Through these stories we heard about personal histories, webs of relationships, power, and political choices situated in particular sites such as diners, town halls, and the doorsteps of homes. As an organizer myself this meant that a middle class, urban, white male like me had a very different experience doing outreach at the doorstep of a mobile home then a young woman who grew up in that same neighborhood.

Common sense you say? Then why are the spatial dimensions of community organizing not taken as seriously as the shape of negotiating tables used in foreign diplomacy, or the designs of classrooms for college classes, or the power dynamics that business consultants can anticipate from where managers sit around a board room table? This 'common sense' is practical knowledge generated by the grounded experiences of organizers that until recently were inadequately considered in writings on community organizing. While the organizers I interviewed spoke in detail about the spatial dimensions of their practice, there is a long road ahead before space and place are fully appreciated for their significance to community organizing.

Only months ago I too overlooked the spatial dimensions of my own work. I rarely focused on my own movements and travels through the spaces and places of communities. Instead, I focused on power, communication, and relationships. I suppose my blind eye to the spatial-ness of organizing was in part my own personal bias, in part a product of my membership in the digital generation, in part a product of a socially and economically privileged life as a middle class white male, and in part a monumental cultural wave of western modernism that often privileges the abstract and technical over the concrete

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and practical. None of my mentors in community organizing suggested a deep consideration of space. The constant use of email and telephones helped me imagine that life could transcend the particulars of space and place.[1] My economic security obscured the strictly enforced divisions of society often obvious to those with less social privileges.

A dimension of my own bias was driven by what James C. Scott in *Seeing Like a State* (1998) identifies as a pervasive cultural trend in modern western culture. Scott shares the illustrative story of three American innovators in modern industrial farming who gathered in a downtown Chicago hotel for two weeks in 1928. While stationed in their hotel room they planned the detailed farm layout, labor force, machinery needs, crop rotations, and work schedule for 500,000 acres of virgin land in Russia to be converted to industrial wheat production. The actual farm turned out to be 375,000 acres, located about 1,000 miles from Moscow. The project would turn out to be an economic failure. For Scott, the story portrays the magnitude of ignorance to the significance of space and place that exists in modern western culture. In Scott's words:

> "The fact that they imagined that such a farm could be planned in a
> Chicago hotel room underlines their presumption that the key issues
> were abstract, technical interrelationships that were context-free…It

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[1] In Organizing for Social Change: Online and Traditional Community Practice" (2002) McNutt and Hick present the opportunities and pitfalls of the recent integration of internet technologies into organizing broadly. They conclude that regardless of the rise of such technological integration, organizers must remain skillful and knowledgeable of face-to-face work. While new communications technologies are increasing the ties between organizations and assisting in the mobilization of people across great distances they do not eliminate historical power differences that affect the ability of various groups to interface in this new virtual space.

was the specific context of this specific farm that defeated them. The farm, unlike the plan, was not a hypothetical, generic, abstract farm but an unpredictable, complex, and particular farm…the kind of failure typical of ambitious high-modernist schemes for which local knowledge, practice, and context are considered irrelevant or at best and annoyance to be circumvented." (p. 201)

Through cycles of critical self-reflection, graduate course work, organizing practice, and research I began to unravel my own assumptions. My participation in such "high-modernist schemes" had become detrimental to my efforts in the communities of Tompkins County. I did not want to fail in my efforts to organize residents in mobile home parks around energy issues. When I realized something wasn't working with our meetings in conference rooms, our own "Chicago hotel rooms", I began to ask harder questions. The journey described in chapter three helped me reconsider some basic assumptions about what matters in community organizing.

It would appear that I had been like a fish in water. As all fish do, I lived and breathed water. The water in fact made up nearly all of my living cells. Since the water was all encompassing, it slipped into my unconscious. Without my close attention, the water that sustained my life and work faded into the background. The lives of people on land and fish in the water are not so different. Life does not happen outside of space and time. We all live in space and through time. Indeed life itself generates more than the sum of space and time. Through living we transform ourselves, and with us space and time.

People concerned with the efficacy of community organizing to aid progressive social movements cannot continue to ignore how this practice is deeply situated in space and place. Continued inattention invites us to drown in an illusion that powerful relationships are all that matter. Ed Chambers, director of the Industrial Areas Foundation, points out in *Roots for Radicals* (2006) that community organizers should recognize how their work is radically embedded in history and fundamentally depends on strong human relationships.

With equal urgency and depth, community organizers, writers on organizing, and academics concerned with this field may one day be compelled to appreciate how space and place are critical dimensions to the success of grassroots democracy and social change as well. Taking seriously how space and place matter is not just an exciting intellectual puzzle. It has practical significance to every moment of rebuilding America's communities and our understanding of how organizers can contribute to this enormous task.

Through the practice stories and reflections of Heating Solutions organizers in chapter three we heard rich descriptions of how they used everyday spaces and places for planning and outreach. Even when the locations were chosen, at times for strategic purposes and often for convenience, there remained the question of how to use these spaces and places. We heard just a few examples where a living room was transformed into a retreat space for planning, a rural diner was embellished to be a site for informal teaching, and an area for listening was carved out within the chaotic hallway of a food pantry. In many cases the stories of how organizers used space illuminated both the spatially situated constraints and opportunities

that organizers encountered. Future organizers may be trained to anticipate these spatially situated treasures and pitfalls.

The variety of locations and strategies described in chapter three were further complicated by the diversity of experiences that evoked feelings of comfort and safety, intimidation and exclusion, and connection and inclusion. Through the details of these experiences we listened to how emotion, personal histories, power, and politically charged choices play out in spatial dimensions. While the physical world presented itself to the organizers through shapes and landscapes, the organizers made these spaces and places meaningful through their experiences. Arrangements of tables and chairs became symbols and instruments of authority. Food, fireplaces, and soft colors welcomed residents into conversations with each other. Public gathering places like diners felt like cheerful, neutral settings where diverse community members could voice shared concerns.

Community organizers, like us all, have meaningful spatially situated experiences. Their efforts to build relationships, increase community connections, strengthen local leadership, and improve communities were all interactions taking place in particular locations and settings. In this sense all of the relational outcomes they generated were spatially situated as well. This interdependence of space and relationship led Mike Kesby (2005; 2057), a social geographer studying the empowerment of women in African communities, to claim that organizing goals like those listed above are "sociospatially relational."

From my fieldwork and the interviews, I came to see that some organizers develop a practical knowledge of this socio-spatial interdependence. This awareness seemed to guide their decisions about what

places to use and how to use them. Unfortunately this awareness was right beneath the surface, only marginally valued in their own reflections on what matters in community organizing. Renowned anthropologist Edward Hall rightly titled his book on such cultural blindness to space, *The Hidden Dimension* (1966). Fortunately, through the interviews for this research these connections between the social and the spatial began to take on new life in the discussions between the organizers I worked with and interviewed.

Through the research process I came to see how these stories become windows for new insights only when they are surfaced and discussed. In time, with increased attention to the spatial dimensions of our social life, organizers and researchers will begin to reveal what has been hidden. To help move us in this direction I use the closing section of this chapter to offer specific practical approaches and topics for research. Before such suggestions, it will be useful to briefly reflect on how theoretical considerations of community organizing can benefit from these spatially situated practice stories. Additionally, I reconsider the utility of traditional distinctions in social research and introduce a way toward alternative frameworks that integrate spatial, personal, and social dimensions.

5.2 Theoretical considerations

Without an integrative theoretical approach to community organizing, we rely on obsolete dichotomies between material and relational domains. For example the World Bank (2006) published an exhaustive book on community empowerment without a single reference to the spaces and places where

organizers have brought people together. Such a book flies in the face of ecologists, planners, designers, geographers, and psychologists who can point to decades of research on how people are biologically, socially, and emotionally interwoven into the spatial, physical world we call Earth. Similarly, when I look back on the initial research interests of the Cornell research team that hired me to work on the Heating Solutions Project, I am amazed at our inattentiveness to the many ways that community organizing plays out in space and place. Perhaps we were caught in the same dualistic worldview that distinguished relationships as a social construct from the material spaces where relationships unfold.

Our initial research focused on the role of social learning in the formation and use of social capital. Although the researchers were interested in the context of the complex interactions between residents and organizers, the spatial and physical situations of these interactions were not seriously considered. "Context" in the research proposals referred to social, political, and institutional settings.[2] Through the research presented here we can now see how such an orientation to social research is consistent with common trends in the social sciences. These trends present images of social settings as removed from their physical location. They replace a consideration of material space with static spatial metaphors such as planning tables. Consideration of actual places and spaces are left to the geographers, ecologists, and planners.

Our whole team was concerned with "who said what?" and not "what happened where?" and "what was it like to be there with those people in that place?" We were not prepared to examine how social, political, and

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[2] The initial research proposal built on the earlier empirical work of Balatti and Falk (2002) on the interactions of social learning and social capital and the work of Cervero and Wilson (1998 & 2001) on the negotiation of power in planning interactions

institutional contexts are situated in physical places. For theoretical purposes the research team's spatial de-contextualization may have been valuable. Every study must determine what variables are important. In that case, space and place were held constant. Yet, as we have seen through this research, the stories of community organizers themselves illuminate multiple, dynamic spatial dimensions of their practice.

In my own research, I came across earlier scholarship on these spatial dimensions of community organizing by a small collection of researchers. These scholars call for more grounded and ethnographic research on the ways that social change practices including community organizing and participatory development, are situated in space (Kesby 2005 and Cornwall 2004). They are concerned about the general under-theorization of the topic. Most other theorists, they claim, are not looking deeply at how the particular spatial dimensions of these practices could enhance or obstruct the intended outcomes. What factors would enable community members to build power in their own particular churches, diners, living rooms, and town halls? How is empowerment impinged by the ways that historical patterns of exclusion and domination are alive in particular spaces and places? How do people reaffirm or transform these disempowering patterns by the ways they act within space and place?

These questions inspired my own exploratory research as a grounded, ethnographic contribution to both scholarly conversations and organizing practice. My approach was to invite organizers to talk about their work, where it takes place, and what the experience of community organizing was like in those particular places. Chapter Three is full of their detailed practice stories and reflections. Earlier in this chapter I also reviewed the themes that emerged

from that chapter. In Chapter Four these themes were then teased apart and considered in the light of earlier research. While expanding and adding detail to these earlier works, Chapter Four illuminated the complex interactions between the personal, social, and spatial dimensions by portraying the spatial practices alive within community organizing.

Although Lefebvre's original conception of spatial practice applied to social life in general, later work on free spaces (King and Hustedde 1993), world traveling (Coles 2004), transformational margins (hooks 1990), situated performances of power (Kesby 2005), and the emotional experiences of space and place (Hiss 1990) helped clarify the complex interactions that intersect within the spatial dimensions of community organizing. Each of these varied approaches helped us unpack the complex themes that emerged from my interviews with organizers and view them in the light of community organizing as a spatial practice. Chapter Four left us with more questions than answers and many rich avenues to explore in future research. Yet, a clear conclusion evolved from my consideration of these various perspectives. There was a common thread that held them together, one that the organizer's stories kept repeating: our human and social experiences are not distinct from the spaces and places we inhabit.

In my view, the narratives, alongside my own field experiences, further compel us to reconsider the classical distinctions between the real and the imagined in our considerations of how community organizing is spatially situated. Instead of providing clarity, these distinctions seem to cloud our ability to understand the integrity of experience and place. The research presented draws our attention to how the subjective and the objective are a radically intertwined whole. In this sense the research points toward the

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propositions of theorists such as Lefebevre that space is a social product, not a neutral container, and that all social relations exist in and through space with no objective reality outside of the sites in which they are lived, experienced, and practiced (Cornwall 2004).

As an exploratory study the research presented here does not support a specific theoretical claim such as 'Heating Solutions organizers embellished existing or created new free spaces through the movement of their bodies across spaces of difference and power, and by moving the democratic table into marginal spaces.' Yet, future research on this claim would be valuable. Instead the research supports a more compelling and simpler case. The stories presented reveal how conceptions of community organizing *only* as a relational practice or a communicative process are only *a partial view* that obscures significant dimensions of this practice. Without a fuller understanding, theorists and the trainers of organizers will be weakened in their support of practitioners. Projects will fail and they will stand over the dead project puzzled by the sudden death. They will claim that not enough time was spent, or they didn't build strong enough relationships, or didn't mobilize sufficient resources (Kesby 2005).

Building on the past work of community organizers and scholars the research presented here supports the notion that organizing is indeed relational work, but is additionally a spatial practice. As a spatial practice, community organizing has the potential to open up, claim, and transform spaces and places where people can build power together. The experiences of these spaces and places will be varied and diverse based on personal and social histories, emotions, social interactions, spatial arrangements, and political choices. From this perspective, spatial practices may also constrain,

impinge, and constrict possibilities for people to build power together. As such community organizing is a skillful practice that must confront complex challenges and opportunities in multiple dimensions including the personal, historical, social, spatial, and ecological.

5.3 Future directions for researchers

In consideration of these complexities, for those concerned with a theoretical understanding of community organizing, a non-dualistic approach will be valuable. For example, in *Thirdspace* (2003), regional planner Edward Soja proposes "trialectics." His approach pushes theoretical considerations of social practices beyond dualities through the incorporation of space into the dialectical relationship between history and subjectivity. A trialectic consideration of community organizing would remind us that the embodied, subjective experiences of people are dynamically related to specific settings and moments in history. If this notion gains in its utility for future research, this study could in fact be seen as an initial and admittedly rough exploration of the trialectics within community organizing.[3]

     Another possible direction for researchers to explore, that has already offered academia centuries of exposure, to similar holistic approaches is the application of indigenous knowledges to the puzzles within modern societies,

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[3] A hopeful signpost on this road is the development of a new international network of academics, business and non-profit leaders, scientists, community leaders, and artists focused on "The Space of Democracy and the Democracy of Space" that according to their announcements aims to "bring together those who have explored the political aspects of spatial practices, with others who have developed constructivist approaches to democratic theory, particularly those concerned with radical politics." See the official announcement at www.apl.ncl.ac.uk/pdfs/PughSpace.pdf

such as presented in *Indigenous knowledges in global context: Multiple readings of our world* (2000). In this expansive collection of recent research, we begin to see how non-western cultures offer invaluable insight where western thought has been remarkably blind. In the case of the Aborigines of Australia, their holistic logic provides a radical, yet grounded, perspective to our consideration of space and community organizing. After many years living with Aborigine communities, anthropologist Robert Lawlor (1991) suggests:

> "Space, in our conventional wisdom, is basically felt as distance, the empty interval separating objects…Aborigines do not perceive space as distance. Space for them is consciousness, and like consciousness, space is divided into two modes. The perceptible, tangible entities in space are like the conscious mind, and the invisible space between things corresponds to the unconscious mind… The logic of space is the logic of a dream. An aboriginal woman recently interviewed on television said, "With your vision you see me sitting on a rock, but I am sitting on the body of my ancestor. The earth, his body, and my body are identical"… In dreams, subject and object interpenetrate. There is no external space separate from the internal. There are no objects or event – be they stars, spaceships, or molecule – separate from the feelings, desires, projections, activities, and images of consciousness." (p. 41 - 42)

The passage leads us into another culture's worldview where subject and object interpenetrate. This orientation is likely to strike most modern thinkers as nonsense or at least unproductive for theory. But are Soja and other theorists discussed earlier not suggesting an approach that assumes such

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a radical integration of previously distinct dimensions. The passage above is a real example of a worldview that embraces the holism of the real and the imagined. In this Aborigine world, life and consciousness are simultaneously a spatial and relational practice.

There is a vast research field ahead that explores this intersection of real and imagined spaces. The spatially situated practices of community organizers and their potential to transform the everyday places we call diners, town halls, and living rooms into spaces for building power is only beginning to be revealed. Through this thesis only a small fraction of these concepts and themes have been explored. Further research is required from a variety of disciplines to help us deepen the analysis of the experiences of community organizers, and how these experiences are woven into the social, historical, and physical dimensions of their communities and the world. One place to start will be to grow the pool of community organizers who share their stories and speak about their spatially situated experiences.

5.4 The road ahead for organizers

Among the diverse themes raised, the voices of organizers in this research have communicated their implicit, practical knowledge of spatially situated experiences and spatial practices through their stories and reflections. While such knowledge was given a platform through their interviews and the overall research project, from my experience this type of practical knowledge is often buried beneath layers of other priorities and considerations.

One opportunity ahead for organizers and those interested in their effectiveness will be the translation of this implicit knowledge into an explicit, practical tool. As I explained in the opening chapter, my primary motivation behind this research was to expose and reflect on the spatial dimensions of this practice that have been taken for granted. We are now in the age of internet-activism and telephone organizing. Today the spatial practices of building power with people in physical places may be over shadowed by the ease, safety, and efficiency of telecommunication technology.

If a community organizer presumes that local capacity can be built through strengthening relationships, focusing on communication, and mobilizing resources then one may imagine that 21st technology can meet all their needs. Yet if an organizer remembers that every relationship, emotion, and historical moment takes place in specific locations, in the movements between places, and in relationship with geography and ecology, then they can become increasingly alert to the spatial dimensions of building power with people.

As organizers pay more attention to their own embodied experience in the spaces where they work (or don't work), they may increasingly appreciate and anticipate the interactions between relationship and setting. Over time they can begin to discuss the spatial-ness of their practice. Through these conversations the meaningful human experiences of space and place can develop into a trainable skill. With increased awareness, one's ability to re-arrange, re-configure, re-perform, and transform ourselves, other community members, and places can be heightened.

In *The Experience of Place* (1990), Tony Hiss describes this "built-in" and improvable capacity as "simultaneous perception." The cognitive process of

moving this capacity from the implicit realm into explicit conscious utilization can have a profound affect on one's ability to engage with the world around them.

"While normal waking consciousness works to simplify perception, allowing us to act quickly and flexibly by helping us remain seemingly oblivious to almost everything except the task in front of us, simultaneous perception is more like an extra, or a sixth, sense: It broadens and diffuses the beam of attention evenhandedly across all the senses so we can take in whatever is around us…With the help of this extra sense, the familiar hard-and-fast boundary between ourselves and our surroundings seems softened, expanding our sense of the space occupied by "here" and the time taken up by "now," and uncovering normally ignored patterns of relationships that make us part of larger groups and events. It's simultaneous perception that allows any of us a direct sense of continuing membership in our communities, and our regions, and the fellowship of all living creatures." (p. xii-xiii)

From Hiss' description we may become curious about how an organizer could strengthen their capacity for simultaneous perception. Instead of making recommendations or providing a list of tips, my project ends as it began, with a teaching story about surfacing assumptions.

Imagine that today is the first day of Introduction to Community Organizing 101. You are told the teacher is a brilliant, long time organizer who has been in the trenches for nearly 4 decades working non-stop to bring communities together to solve the most important issues of her time. You have just taken your seat at the front of the class. You are ready to learn the tried

and true techniques from a master. From all you have learned, practiced, and read organizing is about building power with people, inspiring people, strengthening local relationships, building on local skills and assets, helping create a voice for the voiceless, exposing injustices, and creatively mobilizing resources to achieve a better future.

The teacher walks in and after a short introduction she looks you right in the eye then steps back to take in the entire room. She says, "Just for today forget it all! Forget, for just a moment, about building relationships. Forget about the resources your campaign needs. Forget about communicating a vision. Forget it all. Right now think of the places where you live, imagine the stores you shop in, the halls of your workplace, the cafes and diners you relax in, the places that feel like home to you. Imagine your body in those places. These are your safe places. What does it feel like? What sensations do you have? You can return to these safe places when you need to, but today we are going into uncharted territory.

Starting today go out into the spaces where you are not at home. Spend time in the spaces where people you want to organize inhabit. Step outside of your comfort zone, literally. If you already spend time in the neighborhoods you are organizing, go to the places where you are not yet 'at home'. Travel politely to those spaces where you feel 'out of place.' Notice what begins to happen inside of you. Notice how people look at you. Pay attention to how you arrived there.

Ask yourself: how did you access this new space? Did someone invite you in or did you simply invade the space? How did you feel when you crossed through the entranceway? What signified to you that you were now in a 'new' place? Who inhabits this space? How do people arrange things in this

space? Chairs, tables, signs, photos, food, sources of heat, windows, are not exactly where you would put them at home. How do people communicate in this place? Where are you? Where have you come from? How did you get here? How will you leave? Will it be awkward to leave when you want? The more questions you ask yourself the better. Simply start by noticing where you are standing. Look down at your mother Earth. Thank her as she carries you through life.

APPENDIX

Process for Door to Door, Community by Community Campaign
Heating Solutions Group*

1) Pull together people in a community interested in responding to the energy issue but also interested in identifying and strengthening networks in their community (for future work on other issues). Characteristics and skills needed include networking/knowledge of community, leadership, team building, technical knowledge of energy efficiency measures, organizing/logistical. Categorize volunteers into Core Group, Hands On, Technical, etc. (**Documents: County Situation/Response, Survey, Survey Results**)

2) Develop and agree on a set of goals, some short term and some mid-term. Short-term goals should be very concrete (e.g. survey 80% of households in the village; identify street captains on 75% of the streets in the village; involve every business in the process; etc.). Set geographic boundaries for the action (but don't stick to them strictly—if someone wants to be involved or apply or fill in the form from outside the boundary encourage them to do so). (**Documents: Freeville Goals**).

3) Identify all the groups present in the geographic area, and determine which of them are strategically important for achieving any of the goals. Identify and contact representatives from each group and inform them of what is being planned/proposed. Invite to join if interested, otherwise continue to keep informed. It helps to present some specific tasks (provide a menu of specific tasks?) they might agree to take on so they understand what they would be committing to. Use supplied forms to aid in identifying ALL groups in the area. Determine what messages are likely to be compelling for each group and pitch to them using the compelling messages.(For example, when speaking with fire department personnel stress the need for this work to heighten safety and awareness of safety). (**Documents: List of groups/messages**)

4) Identify all streets or neighborhoods and attempt to identify "street or neighborhood captains", people who might be willing to contact some or all the rest of the people in their neighborhood or street to fill in the survey. Contact them, explain and invite to get involved. These should be people who are known and trusted in the neighborhood. The door to door work will be initiated on streets or in those neighborhoods where the captains have been identified. More work will be done more quickly and the rapid progress will help maintain momentum by motivating others to join, and by maintaining the interest of those already on board. (**Documents: Street/Neighborhood Captains Contact Form, Street Form**)

5) Identify volunteers who will serve as skilled labor. This includes those who will do the relatively simple stuff as well as some certified electricians who should do the

water heater timers (and the difficult programmable thermostats). Contact, explain and invite. **(Document: Volunteer Form)**

6) Determine whether there will be any community celebrations or dinners or fundraisers that might be willing to accommodate the presence of this campaign at the event. This might be to distribute surveys or simply to raise awareness or celebrate the success of the campaign.

7) Gather educational materials related to the items outlined in the survey form and place in strategic locations in the area (so people who need more information can get it easily). **(Documents: Hard Copies of each; Weblinks, web addresses for each)**

8) Develop and place "drop boxes" in central locations in the community (so people who can't fill in the form immediately can drop it off easily, but try to get them to fill in their name and contact information right then and there, even if they don't fill in the survey). Develop good signage to make it easy for people identify drop boxes. **(Documents: Signage templates)**

9) Develop signage to publicize the effort and to help the entire community keep track of progress.

10) Prepare announcements to go out in local papers, newsletters, placed at the local post office and other congregation places. Invite participation by anyone interested. **(Documents: Sample announcements)**

11) Develop a spiel to guide the canvassers on what to say. **(Document: Example of Freeville spiel)**

12) Begin the work.

13) For those neighborhoods where captains were not identified by the steering group try to identify the captains by checking in with other groups in the area, or by going door to door in the particular neighborhood until you find someone who would be willing to take on the task (or able to recommend someone else in the neighborhood who might).

14) Try to do the survey work in a very short period of time, to help maintain interest. This is much easier to do if all the previous steps have been done.

15) Organize and analyze the data as it comes in. Determine which streets or neighborhoods are finished and focus later efforts on those areas that contain populations that are underrepresented. Have a standard Excel worksheet that everyone can use as a template so they can fill in the data themselves. Data entered into the worksheets can then be checked by the core group, by comparing worksheets to the raw data from the actual surveys.

16) Provide awards, have celebrations, maintain publicity, share results and ideas with other similar efforts in the county. Have drawings.

17) Be on the lookout for leadership and interest on the part of ANYONE in the community (youth, seniors, poor, rich, etc.).

18) Encourage those who might be able to afford to contribute to do so. Make it easy for them to do so, and remind them that it will be one of the few donations they make that will multiply in value by several times in a very few months.

19) Gather and record NAMES and addresses. Trace networks and how information travels in them. This is KEY for future work.

20) Direct Action:

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