

6 THE EVOLUTION OF AN ENVIRONMENTALIST GROUP TOWARD PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: CIVIC KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION AND TRANSGRESSIVE IDENTITIES

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This study follows a local environmental group as it shapes a civic identity, before and after a municipal election, towards taking up a speaking position within the participation framework of city governance. This is an exploration and analysis of the tense co-existence of conflicting, oppositional identities, of marginality and power, in the context of local environmental conflict. The central question revolves around how this local group participates in the construction of civic discourse and community knowledge to build its political capital, and how, at the same time, it retains its activist discourse and marginal identity. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to current interdisciplinary scholarship on the issue of public participation in government decision-making and discourse studies on marginal identities and identity development. In this context, it is an effort to provide an analysis of how discursive rhetorical strategy functions in civic identity development and how the management of available discursive resources can enable citizen participation without disabling an activist identity.

Studies of public participation in environmental decision-making have found that local democratic political processes in environmental contexts are often dysfunctional. Such studies have, for the most part, yielded scenarios of

unproductive processes of public participation, usually generating frustration among citizens, and deadlocking opposition between activists and government/industry. For example, in a study of the U.S. Forest Service's approach to public involvement, Walker (2004) found that, while the Forest Service propounded the importance of collaboration as a matter of policy, in practice it actually discouraged public engagement (p. 134). In a separate study of the Forest Service, Schwarze (2004) found that Forest Service management is over-preoccupied with the regulatory mechanisms for public discourse, with the result that there is now "a trained incapacity" among employees and management for addressing the question of legitimate public input (p. 154). In another study, Gregory (2001) found that citizens experienced the official body of the port authority as "not only elusive and unaccountable but also ... to be in the service of urban development policies promoting ... 'outside' economic interests of ... elites" (p. 143). Gregory concluded that these residents became shut out of public participation because the port authority ultimately "governed the political arena of neighborhood activism" and what was permitted to be "the politically sayable" in public debate (p. 167). Having studied a number of these cases, Depoe and Delicath (2004) concluded that public participation in environmental decision-making fails because community input often solicited by public officials is not allowed to affect "policy choices or regulatory outcomes" (p. 10). Similarly, based on her study of stakeholders in such processes of public input, Senecah (2004) found that they felt that their involvement was not "productive or meaningful" and that "the public had no voice" (p. 19). Indeed, those working in forest policy and research themselves have acknowledged the perception that community input has been futile in most processes of public participation:

In the past, federal agencies like the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have failed to successfully involve the public in natural resource planning and decisions. Community-based practitioners feel—after two decades of "public involvement" in which their comments have been synthesized, coded, counted, considered too late, or taken out of context—they have had little or no impact on what happens to the forests that surround them. (Gray & Kusel, 1998, p. 28)

Although not great in number, there are some encouraging stories of environmental activism. For example, Ingham (1996) reports on the rhetorical sophistication of the Beartooth Front Alliance and its consequent success in protecting the environment of the community of Red Lodge. Cooper (1996) applauds the successes of the Nature Conservancy and its efforts to include

“both protesters and accommodators” in the process of environmental change (p. 256). Clearly, the rhetorical work of activists in these sensitive contexts need not always be thwarted by dismissive official processes or lead to deadlock and stalemate. This paper is intended to contribute to these studies and to deepen our understanding of how, in contexts of environmental conflict, productive knowledge building of accounts which are critical of government and lead to change may occur, and how it can occur without repudiating an activist identity. How do non-mainstream individuals and groups both effectively mobilize those features of a dominant discourse to receive recognition or acceptance by the dominant group, and, at the same time, sustain those transgressive features of discourse that are critical to their identity?

This question evolved as I studied the ongoing activities of a local environmental group over its third year of existence, from 2005 to 2006. The question owes much of its formulation to the work of Holland and Lave (2001), who ask how “people [can] act so as to foreground one kind of identity over others in local contentious practice, and at the same time act in ways saturated with other identity practices” (p. 26). By the end of the group’s first two years (2005), my findings suggested that its members might become stuck with the dead-end effects of a polarizing activist discourse that precludes genuine public input. As the study proceeded into the group’s third year, however, my findings began to suggest not a polarization but a co-existence of opposing discourses, inviting more focus on the constructive possibilities for such co-existence as an alternative to the usual scenarios of confrontation between activist citizens and their governments.

By the end of the third year, I found that the group’s most effective strategy was its contributions to community knowledge-making. In the context of an election campaign, the group collaborated with other environmentalist groups to develop a community message that candidates would listen to. This message construction fostered the group’s civic identity and its realization of the larger goal of entering civic discourse on environmental decision-making. In effect, as a basis for broader political support, the group contributed to the building of community knowledge that led to widespread awareness and concern over the mayor-in-council’s cavalier dismissal of public input into land use decisions. Its efforts involved the strategic use of resources available from both activist and civic discourses to build community knowledge through the production and reproduction of certain community “sayings,” and thereby to create its linguistic capital. This work entailed using the tactics of reported speech to produce linguistic expressions suitable for the linguistic market. The group’s goal was to make its account of the city’s “deafness” to public input on the development of natural areas prevail as community knowledge, and thereby achieve

“acceptability” in the “market” of city politics (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 81). As a result, when the city’s participation framework shifted with electoral change, the group became aligned with the new, salient account of events, and it had sufficient political capital to take up a speaking position afforded within this changed market. At the same time, the group protected a more transgressive discourse and hard-won activist identity, an identity that government representatives seemed to tolerate, and even accept, in meetings with the group. The group had fashioned a civic identity for itself and sustained its more activist identity and discourse.

To demonstrate how this group motivated and participated in the construction of community knowledge, and how it constructed its civic identity, I have adopted a theoretical framework that incorporates analyses of discursive conflict, identity development (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001), and knowledge construction as discursive formation (Foucault, 1972 a, 1972b). This framework is also applied to an analysis of how and why the group sustained its activist identity even as it achieved a civic speaking position. In what follows, I first provide a brief background of the group and the issues at stake, then elaborate the theoretical framework, describe my research methodology, and discuss the findings of the study. I have drawn on representative discursive events, both pre- and post-election, to illustrate the group’s management of its civic identity, and the co-existing persistence of its activist identity.

BACKGROUND

The focus of this study is the third year of activity of the group, an umbrella organization for a number of environmentalist groups within a large Canadian city, now with 175 members. The group was organized by the project manager for the natural areas management plan and mandated by the city’s natural areas management policy. This policy states that “A Commission natural area advisory committee should be formed to identify, promote, advocate and educate for, and about, natural areas and their benefits” (2003). Most members of the group have an activist history and long-time involvement in the community as volunteers and self-appointed, but welcome, stewards of the land. A number of them sit on other city advisory committees. The overriding purpose of the group is to advocate for natural areas, which have been undergoing rapid and questionable development with what many community members see as minimal or no public consultation. The city’s growth continues at a rate of 800 people each month and as of May 2007 was over 410,000.

The group has acted independently but more often with other community groups and individuals to protest the destruction of specific sites of trees, streams, riparian corridors, and other environmentally sensitive areas taken for residential development. Often, by the time local residents realize what is happening, the developer has received approval and begun clearing the land. The group has initiated or participated in such activities as public meetings for input on new developments; meetings with the mayor, city managers and staff; interviews with the media; and writing letters to the mayor-in-council and regional governments, as well as numerous letters-to-the-editor to local newspapers. The group also holds its regular monthly meetings, frequently inviting guests—city staff and managers, wildlife and sustainability experts, and provincial civil servants—to discuss specific land development issues. Over 2005/2006, attendance at monthly meetings ranged from 7 to 20 members. Most communication among members and with other groups occurs through e-mail.

A recent example of the group's ongoing involvement with the local media, now a year subsequent to the period reported on in this chapter, shows the considerable challenge that the group continues to face in its advocacy for responsible land development. Days after another episode of unapproved tree-cutting, one local newspaper in July 2007 reported that "more than 30 tall conifers" were "cut down for a housing development." The article cites a member of the environmental group who is president of the local community association. She describes the areas as a "moonscape," and asks, "Are these the rules of the [city], has anything changed?" The article also reports that the president of the group itself was "troubled by a trend in [the city] of razing properties for development." A separate article in the same issue reports that "record residential development resulted in the loss of an average of 9,100 trees annually between 2001 and 2004," a figure that excludes one "huge cut in ... [a] business park which amounted to 14,000 protected trees lost." In spite of promises by the new mayor in 2005 to regulate and moderate the removal of trees in the city, and since the enactment of a new tree bylaw in 2005 and the inclusion of the environmental group as one of the mayor's community advisors, the rate of tree-cutting has continued to accelerate. The article refers to the president of the group as one "who helped put together [the city's] new tree protection bylaw" and reports her judgment that "the legislation doesn't appear to be having much of an effect." The article also reports the comments of the new mayor: "we've got to do a better job"; "more can be done to slow the number of trees coming down."

Initially, the project manager discouraged activist practices, reminding members periodically that the committee was sponsored by the parks and recreation department. In effect, they had been charged to advocate for the environment as a kind of satellite body attached to the periphery of the city through parks

and recreation. However, after achieving recognition by the former mayor-in-council in its first year as an official delegation to city hall, it lost the city's support. In response to an incident that the city interpreted as face-threatening, the city severed its relations with the group. In its third year, the focus of this study, the group remobilized its efforts, working with other members of the community towards achieving public input in land use decisions. They used the pending municipal election in this effort, exploiting the resources available through candidates seeking a profile and heightened media interest to make their account of the city's dismissive attitude toward public input the official one in the community.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I describe the conceptual framework that is marshaled to understand the evolution of the group's civic identity. I first discuss the relationship between identity development, discursive knowledge construction, and positionality. This is followed by a discussion of transgressive discourse and marginal identities.

Identity, Discursive Formation, and Positionality

Ongoing work on the dynamics of conflicting discourses has focused on how marginal individuals and groups strategize to use available discursive resources to manage identities, yet resist being subsumed into a dominant or mainstream "normative" discourse (Bourdieu, 1991; Holland & Lave, 2001; Holland et al., 1998). Such a radical heterogeneity of identities necessarily entails both the achievement of power/knowledge and the play of non-sedimented power relations. On the one hand, agents engage in the rhetorical-discursive learning of the features of a dominant discourse as an exercise in discursive knowledge construction—and they come, consequently, to acquire authentic speaking rights through a repositioning within the dominant participation framework (Goffman, 1981) that aligns them with institutional power. On the other hand, they also maintain a marginal identity that neither threatens their public speaking rights nor loses itself to the dominant institutional structures.

Identity develops through a variety of rhetorical-discursive practices that reinforce the emergence or prior existence of a discursive formation. As practice, it is "the structuring of social existence ... in the lived activities of subjects who both participate in it and produce cultural forms that mediate it" (Holland & Lave, 2001, p. 4). In this study, "lived activities" include rhetorical strategiz-

ing, occupying certain speaking positions, attending meetings, and carrying out other advocacy activities. The “cultural forms” that agents produce and use are the socially recognizable genre performances they enact as they work towards their goal of being heard by the city, and of making their account of the city’s attitude towards public input the account of others. As Holland and Lave assert, “[m]uch of what is contested in local struggles is the very meaning of what’s going on” (p. 20). Marginal groups, thus, face the particularly difficult challenge of making their interpretation of events the official account; moreover, in their efforts to meet this challenge, they must use the cultural forms and “the language of the other” (p. 11): “any given struggle is partially formed in the taking up of the idiom of others” (p. 26). Holland and Lave further explain that “[t]he dialogic selves formed in local contentious practice are selves engaged with others across practices and discourses inflected by power and privilege” and that, although such selves may find these practices “uncomfortable” to adopt, “they cannot simply refuse” them (p. 18). In dialogical terms, in enduring struggles, the “answers made by the contentious others are authored in the cultural discourses and practices at hand” (p. 30); on the other hand, in the gap between transgression and reproduction there is space for innovation and generativity. In studying “culture in practice” as opposed to “culture as rules” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 278), improvisation comes into view as a significant feature of the scene of struggle. While such improvisation is limited by the type of space afforded for “authoring” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 279) and the available cultural forms, there is space for strategic play with the contingencies and uncertainties that develop in struggle, even if only temporarily.

As a discursive formation becomes attached to power and develops, so do opportunities for the identity development of marginal groups. Following Foucault (1972a, 1972b), I applied the concepts of discursive field and discursive formation to analyze conflicting discourses in relation to identity development. Such analyses help show how a discursive formation comes about through the strategic reiteration of certain sayings or statements, and how the salience of certain statements as the official account of events can be implicated in change and reconfigured speaking positions. Foucault (1972a) defines a discursive formation as the heterogeneous dispersal of a group of “statements” that form a unity through the “interplay” of certain “rules.” A discursive formation is therefore characterized by its unique combination of rules and co-occurring objects, concepts, or themes. The interplay of rules “make[s] possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time” (pp. 32-33), as well as the appearance of certain concepts. For example, the accepted practices of citizen engagement with governments and the common practices of proponents of development make possible the emergence of objects and concepts such as sustainability,

green growth, and community. The concepts that characterize a discursive formation, however, do not form a coherent set, but instead are significant to the discursive formation for “their simultaneous or successive emergence” (p. 35). For example, concepts such as democracy and nature emerge together in environmental conflicts. Similarly, a discursive formation can be characterized by a number of themes that provide, not stable meanings, but instead a “dispersion of the points of choice, and define prior ... to any thematic preference, a field of strategic possibilities” (p. 37). For example, the theme of environmental sustainability offers a number of positions and strategic possibilities, many of which may be incompatible with others, such as environmental protection and economic sustainability. In short, a discursive formation is a discourse: “a system of dispersion ... between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices” that constitute a “regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations)” (p. 38).

In Foucault’s view, a discourse can be approached broadly or narrowly: in terms of “its general domain of all statements,” “as an individualizable group of statements,” or “as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements” (p. 80). All three approaches are incorporated in this study—a general approach for descriptions of conflicting discourses, and a narrower focus on both specific statements, as they are developed and become salient, and on the activist, political, and journalistic practices that reinforce these statements and attach them to power.

Identity development occurs through the strategic use of statements and regulated practices—cultural forms that are necessarily shared with or available through the dominant group. In exploiting these forms, the repeatability of the “statement,” the primary building block of discursive formations, is a key resource. Foucault emphasizes the centrality of the “statement” in discursive formations. He attributes the statement’s force to its “repeatability,” its capacity for enunciative “duplications,” its “possibilities of reinscription and transcription” (1972a, pp. 103–105). And, although Foucault explicitly brackets “the presence of authors” (p. 38), he presents the statement as a significant resource for speakers. Foucault posits “a field of stabilization” that derives from the attachment of the statement, in its repeatability, to power: “the statement ... appears with a status,” “a certain modifiable heaviness” that “reveals the statement” as an object that speakers “produce, manipulate, use, transform, exchange, combine, decompose and recompose, and possibly destroy” (p. 105). The “statement” is a key resource in human struggles: “Thus, the statement circulates, is used, disappears, allows or prevents the realization of a desire, serves or resists various interests, participates in challenge and struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation or rivalry” (p. 105).

Each reported version of an account offered by a marginal group thus has the potential to become the formulation of a statement. As instances of reported speech accumulate, they can become attached to power, thereby increasing the political capital of those who re-formulate and institutionalize the account. In dialogical terms, each formulation or “utterance” acquires something from each of its enunciative contexts and is therefore, a “hybrid construction ... that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two ... ‘languages,’ two semantic and axiological belief systems” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 304). As different speakers with different motivations strategically appropriate formulations into their different belief systems, reported speech can become progressively more salient. In belief systems or ideologies that successively afford greater power through repeated enunciations and institutional affiliation, these recontextualizations can lead to the formation of a “statement,” bringing with it, for speakers, the affordances of more legitimate speaking positions within the enunciative field of the statement.

The statement provides the conditions of possibility for the emergence of certain objects, discourses, sentences, and speaking positions, such that “the position of the subject can be assigned” (Foucault, 1972a, p. 95). These are subjects who have acquired political capital through their utterances of an influential statement, so that even marginal subjects may become legitimized by the statement and be assigned or come to occupy speaking positions within the statement’s enunciative field. The work of developing a discourse and identity out of the resources of the dominant discourse enables subjects to be called into or “interpellated” by an institutional structure. Group members may then participate with agency in the forces of change.

The enunciative field of a statement develops in what Bourdieu (1991) calls the “linguistic marketplace.” In his introduction to Bourdieu, Thompson (1991) explains that, in practice, participants do not act upon, but in relation to, their social context—a “field of action” or “market” (p. 14). The market is “a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or ‘capital,’” such as economic, cultural, symbolic, linguistic, political, and so on (p. 14). Within this marketplace, linguistic or symbolic power can be transformed into political power as participants develop a suitable “habitas” or “set of dispositions” (p. 15). As Thompson summarizes, Bourdieu’s “linguistic utterances” are “the product of the relation between a linguistic habitas” made up of “dispositions acquired ... to speak in particular contexts,” and “a linguistic market” (p. 17). The market is always a site of struggle where “different speakers possess different” capacities “to produce expressions” suitable to the “particular market” and where “the distribution of linguistic capital is related ... to the distribution of other forms of capital

... which define the location of an individual within the social space” (p. 18). It is in this sense that a “suitable expression” carries the weight of a “statement.”

The next section takes the broader view of discourse, moving beyond the phenomenon of specific linguistic expressions and statements, to examine the relationship between transgressive discourse and marginal identities.

Transgressive Discourse and Identity

The persistence of transgressive discourses, existing alongside those of mainstream discourses, has become an arresting object of investigation in studies of conflicting discourses. The features of transgressive discourses can function as evidence and reinforcement of a hard-won identity. In some cases, these features can come to be tolerated and even validated by those with speaking positions within dominant discourses. Such tolerance is in direct opposition to more traditional, dismissive attitudes that treat transgressive discourse as non-rational, and, therefore, irrelevant—often a default response that only intensifies mistrust of political authority (Wynne, 1992, p. 278). Allowing for (and perhaps endorsing) the non-rational is not an endorsement of relativity; it is, however, an acknowledgment of the indeterminacy of a post-modern world that, according to Wynne, has displaced “the modernist paradigm of singular unconditional rationality” and the corresponding “concept of social identities as unproblematic and completed” (Wynne, 1992, p. 295). Therefore, a more explanatory concept of social actor would include both types of social identities, those that are discursively constructed in situations of social dependence on a more powerful “other,” and “alternative social identities,” conveyed through dialogically generated, transgressive discourses that constitute “answers” to messages of hegemonic power and deafness to marginal identities. In this view, the social actor is therefore, reflective of “a complex existence within different social worlds” (Wynne, 1992, p. 296).

In their explanation of the persistence of transgressive identities, Holland and Lave (2001) refer to “intense” addressivity whereby one is addressed with heightened provocation. They adapt Bakhtin’s premise that “sentient beings—alone and in groups—are always ... in a state of being ‘addressed’ and in the process of ‘answering’” (Holland & Lave, 2001, pp. 9–11). “In answering (which is the stuff of existence) the self ‘authors’ the world—including itself and others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 173). In being intensely addressed, especially when negatively addressed, a group may answer by authoring itself as radical. Holland and Lave (2001) cite the case of IRA women prisoners who responded to punitive strip searches by reasserting their political identities as committed members of the IRA (p. 16). They adopted the practice of publicly rehearsing the com-

mon experience of being subjects of strip searches. So, a transgressive identity may become a group's *raison d'être*, with its practices of identification serving to reinforce its transgressive self). As people identify themselves with unacceptable objectifications of themselves, they construct a rationale for resentment and further resistance (Holland et al., 1998, p. 143). While this often reinscribes a marginal identity, which can further distance a group from the center, it is the necessary ground for action. In this sense, transgressive discourse can circulate as a necessary force for re-motivating resistance to power at the institutional level and re-affirming a marginal identity that exists contiguously with a more institutional identity.

METHOD

My research methodology has been ethnographic and qualitative. It includes the development of a participant-observer relationship with a municipal parks and recreation department, which provided a basis for the interpretation of both contextual and textual data. My involvement with the department began as a member of an urban forest advisory committee and then as a consultant hired to help revise the natural areas management plan in 2000–2001. Subsequent to working for the department I began the research project, studying the internal collaborative development of the natural areas management plan (2001), the staff/community collaboration to develop policy from the plan (2002–2003), and the activities of the advocacy group, which was mandated by the policy (2003–ongoing).

Like other ethnographers of social practice, I have focused on relevant “local practices” and “cultural forms,” such as monthly meetings and public hearings: as objects of investigation, these are “starting points” in the effort to show how, at the local level, enduring struggles “are structured by and structuring of state and civil institutions” (Holland & Lave, 2001, p. 9).

The primary method of data collection has been recording observations at the group's monthly meetings from June 2005 to May 2006. Notes were taken at all meetings; with the exception of two meetings, discussion was audio taped and transcribed in simplified form (with minimally detailed phonological markings). This data has been interpreted in the context of written documents that help explain the oral data: minutes of the meetings, numerous e-mails and letters, newspaper articles and letters-to-the-editor (from three local newspapers), and a number of foundational city documents.

The focus on a local manifestation of an enduring struggle is conceptually and methodologically supported by similar studies whose motivations are

both research-based and social. Holland and Lave's (2001) inquiry is primarily research-based, though implicitly socially motivated: they explore enduring struggles and the cultural production of identity, "beginning from situated participation" in order to illuminate "the generative, conflictual participation of persons in practice" (p. 5). Their work examines local conflict in order to show how it mediates both the "broader structural forces" of enduring struggles and the agency and identity of individuals and groups (p. 9). Others, like Williams and Matheny (1995), who investigate public participation in environmental decision-making, explicitly combine research and social goals. They hope to discover, through studies of local citizen engagement, "a pathway to reconstructing citizenship" at the federal and state levels (p. 10). Through the findings that follow here I analyze one group's strategies to assert their citizenship as agents with a speaking position within the structures of city governance.

FINDINGS

Reconstructing a Civic Identity through Mainstream and Community Affiliations

Addressees and Answers: Responding to the City's "Deafness". As described earlier, this umbrella group was created in 2003 through parks and recreation policy, but lost the city's support a year later. Since then, it has tried to recoup its lost speaking rights and political capital. In the run-up to the city's Fall 2005 election, the recurrent theme in the group's deliberations, and in the discourse of a significant number of members of the community-at-large, was the perceived "deafness" of city hall to public input on land development proposals. A typical comment comes from a group member at their July 2005 meeting: "And it doesn't matter if you have a public hearing or not because they just do what they want." The theme persists at subsequent meetings. For example, members had provided solicited written input to the city in response to a proposal to develop part of a large park into a golf course. The city had surveyed the public for its response to the proposal with a set of questions. Group members provided their responses, including comments that went beyond the specific questions. These additional contributions were not included in the city's corporate report presented by council at the following regular council meeting, yet members believed they should have been:

Member 1: I started to do some more reading on this corporate report, and ... I still haven't found those areas where I proposed things that weren't in the questions.

Member 2: And I didn't see any mention ... of the comments that I made about the need to have development permit areas as a tool ...

Member 3: So ... if it wasn't in the questions that parks staff, planning staff devised, then ... the public input didn't get recorded. (July 28, 2005)

The theme of "deafness" has also been ongoing in local newspapers in letters-to-the-editor from both citizens-at-large and group members. These letters capture the perceived indifference of council to public input in depictions of council members as "cardboard cutouts," a "mayor who won't listen to those who elected him," and "these people" who have ignored "all" of the recommendations stipulated in city-commissioned environmental assessments:

Most of the council could have cardboard cutouts of themselves at these hearings, and no one would know the difference. (letter-to-the-editor, April 27, 2005)

I urge everyone to lift a pen or phone to protest what is happening to our section of the world. If our mayor won't listen to those who elected him, it's time to find someone who will. (letter-to-the-editor, July 6, 2005)

There's the city's own critically important 1996 Environmental Assessment Report that ... classified the area [already under development] as ESA1, or most sensitive. There's also the ... Wildlife Assessment (2003) and the two ... Bio-Inventory reports (1996, 2001) on aquatic and terrestrial habitats... Among the many recommendations in the reports were: Sparing the mature forest areas and ... tributaries of [a local river] ... expanding riparian zones... To date all of these recommendations have been ignored. Acres of mature forest have been leveled; ponds and wetlands filled in; original streams trenched up ... Councilors have stated they were not apprised of this before voting for the project [the creation of an industrial park] in 2003. How can this happen ... Citizens of [the city] have an opportunity to hold these people to account come November. Make sure your voice is heard. (letter to the editor from a group member, Aug. 3, 2005)

A number of newspaper articles take up the same theme; for example, “[h]uge parcels of land centred around [a green corner in a quiet neighborhood] have been cleared of trees and leveled to create building sites and that’s got environmentalists crying foul.... [the mayor] did not return calls for comment before the [newspaper’s] press deadline” (Sept. 7, 2005).

Eventually, the theme is taken up by the rival mayoral candidate who appropriates it as part of his platform. He states that people’s “voices or concerns” are not “heard at city hall,” that “they feel shut out” by the city’s “culture of control.” His statements are reproduced here from a newspaper account:

“People don’t feel that their voices or concerns are heard at city hall,” [he] said ... [He] said the problem extends to development in the city and residents often feel decisions are made before council sits down to publicly debate issues. “There has to be a balance and process where people feel they are heard. Right now, they feel shut out. A culture of control ... has developed at city hall under [the mayor].” (Oct. 8, 2005)

Reported speech, such as these reformulations, involves the repetition of certain sayings, which can be recontextualized in more powerful arenas (like the press) until, in the Foucauldian sense, they acquire the salience and social force of statements. The community’s “statement,” asserting the city’s deafness to its citizenry, becomes the basis for its response, which is to expose the mayor’s apparent indifference to the electorate. Since one is “always in a state of being ‘addressed’ and in the process of ‘answering’” (Holland & Lave, 2001, pp. 9-11), the mayor’s message of indifference has the effect on citizens of an intensely hostile addressivity. In perceiving itself to be so negatively addressed (blatantly non-addressed), the environmentalist group, along with others in the community, develops a correspondingly intense answer in formulations of a counter-statement.

As Senecah (2004) found in studies of public participation in civic issues, citizens frequently experienced a lack of access to civic decision-making space, or a lack of standing—a speaking position from which to be heard. In the absence of either or both, Senecah found that citizens “become frustrated, angry, and increasingly antagonistic and aggressive in creating the space” where they “can claim ... access or standing” (p. 25). Lacking “civic legitimacy,” groups like those studied by Senecah may revert to transgressive expressions of opposition. They can “act dramatic, loud, obnoxious, emotional, and even threatening” in an effort to “creat[e] their own standing by creating media events, bolstering their organization, appealing to other citizens to join them, and trying to intimidate

officials into thinking of further repercussions” (p. 31). To some extent, this is how the advocacy group began to construct its answer to the city. And, to the same extent, this is how the features of its transgressive identity came to serve its objective at the initial stage of its response strategy.

In response to this deafness, the group came to form two collaborations: one with a national, more mainstream environment group, “The Green Group,” and the other with other community groups who, together, hosted an all-candidates meeting. The success of these collaborations depended upon, among other conditions, the strategic use of cultural forms that were available and “at hand.” These turned out to be the genres of “report cards,” newspaper ads, all-candidates meetings, and newspaper reports.

Building Identity through Mainstream Affiliation. In the first collaboration, the two groups canvassed candidates with environmentally related questions and published the results in two local newspapers. The exercise was an opportunity for the group to participate in the shaping of a civic discourse that would address candidates and other members of the community. The group developed the questions, with guidelines set by the Green Group advisor. For example, the advisor indicated early on that “there might be some questions that [The Green Group] would feel ... uncomfortable asking ... and other questions that would be in line with [their] mission statement.” He justified this gate-keeping based on the Green Group’s monetary contribution: “because we’re paying for the ad and our logo is all over it, we’ll have a say” (August 23, 2005). A month later, he evaluates the questions—“Maybe I can just share with you some examples of ... ones that I thought worked, and then make a recommendation and then hear back from you.” He also sets a key criterion that the questions should be general instead of site-specific: One of the things I was looking at were ... questions that, um ... were non-site specific ... so that we really appealed to a general public ... as opposed to just the people who lived around a particular neighbourhood” (Sept. 20, 2005).

This strategy, as others have noted, aims for identification across a community, a kind of common ground that environmental activists often lose in their focus on site-specific issues. As Gregory (2001) explains, a focus on “place-based identities” offers “ineffective subject positions from which to formulate needs, interests, and strategies in relation to regional political and economic processes” (p. 151). As the advisor thus guides the group, he tutors them in strategies for addressing institutional players, and, for the most part, members defer to his expertise. For example, on the issue of who should contact the candidates, there is agreement that the Green Group would be more appropriate because it “is seen as very non-partisan” (Sept. 20, 2005), an indication that there is a shared consciousness that the group’s more activist and marginal position may be a liability:

Member: Will you be sending the emails to the candidates?

Advisor: Well, we can ...

Member: Under your name?

Advisor: We can talk about that. I think, um ... in some way, well, yeah.

Member: I think that would be best.

Advisor: I kind of think it would be best as well.

Member: Yeah.

Advisor: Just because [the Green Group] is seen as very non-partisan.

Member: Exactly. Yeah.

Advisor: And we'd be very clear that we're partnering with [the group] on ... this ... and be very clear that we're printing their responses. (Sept. 20, 2005)

Members continue to assess their profile in this collaboration and find it satisfactory. For example, at the next meeting, from which the advisor is absent, one member who was involved in developing the questions reports on their progress. He sums up the content of the advisor's latest e-mail, reporting first that the advisor has been deliberating their strategy at the head office: "the pow-wow he's talking about is with his communications team in Toronto." He also reports that the communications team has decided to "go with the report card format" with "both our ... logo and the [Green Group's] logo ... at the top of the report card" (Oct. 18, 2005). At the subsequent meeting, four days before the election, mutual thanks are exchanged, and, taking the advisor's lead, general satisfaction is expressed with the report card ad and the candidates' responses to their questions. The president of the group, who also chairs the group's meetings, reiterates the advisor's positive assessment of the process and the advisor points to future uses of the results of the survey in holding candidates accountable to their responses:

Advisor: Well, it was a really good process.

President: And, I think, as you've said, it's our first time we've had a chance, and next time it'll be better.

Advisor: And I think the responses ... I don't know how much is ... you know, candidate-speak at the forum, but ... I think ... they were put on the spot ... it holds them accountable, so now ... we have a lot of yeses and details now to play with ... to go back and say, you know, you were very public with this, and if they don't deliver (Nov. 15, 2005)

At the end of the meeting, the advisor reinforces the affiliative effects of this general satisfaction with their mutual effort by inviting the group to participate in future events, attaching to the invitation a request for a letter of support from the group, and offering to provide a template of the letter. As an available cultural form, the template offers the group another opportunity to shape its discourse and identity with the material of a more mainstream idiom, that of the bureaucracy in which the national group participates. In exchange for writing the "form" letter, the group has received funding and guidance towards its immediate goals.

In addition to their yes/no responses, the candidates' longer comments were published on the Green Group's Web site. Notably, among the responses is the rival mayoral candidate's promise of a "culture of environmentally aware development," a phrase standing in for his earlier critical reference to the current "culture of control." His statement yokes this projection into office with an appropriation of the community's message to improve the process of public input on development from groups like the environmentalist group:

As I believe in balanced growth, I believe that it is important to continue to *develop* but that it is done in an *environmentally aware manner*.... One of the biggest problems currently is that *public consultations* are not taken seriously by *council*.... The *culture of environmental awareness* must be led first and foremost by the elected political chief amongst them *the Mayor*. (Nov. 17, 2005 [emphasis added])

Formulations of this statement have appeared in many earlier incarnations from a number of citizens, including a letter-to-the-editor from the group's president. The need for public input to ensure good development is the key message: "Natural areas ... are necessary. We are not opposed to development. We advocate for *quality development* ... we believe *council* should hold a *public*

hearing to allow people to *express their concerns directly to council*" (April 29, 2005 [emphasis added]).

The mayoral candidate's formulation of the issue is also apparent in his comments drawn from an interview and published in a local newspaper:

"I'm hearing on a fairly regular basis that *residents don't feel their voice is being heard*, that land-use issues have already been decided before ever hearing the community's concerns," [he] said this week. "We need to make sure there's *a process in place for dealing with development applications*, in that there is *no interference from the mayor's office* or senior managers." (November 12, 2005 [emphasis added])

All agents who reproduce this statement invest it with their own motivations. Following Foucault (1972a), "according to the position, status and role of one formulation among others ... the way in which other statements are present in the mind of the subject will not be the same" (p. 98). The mayoral candidate's appropriation of this statement likely occurs in the context of his electoral ambitions and is endowed with his political motivations. For environmental advocates, one could speculate that formulations of the statement emerge from the context of land protection and green development and are endowed with ostensibly altruistic motivations.

Building Identity through Local Affiliation. Throughout the process, group members have met with key candidates, and, in a second collaboration, they have teamed up with a number of community groups to host an all candidates meeting focused on "sustainability" (which the incumbent mayor did not attend). Group members extended the report card strategy by using the results as a basis for their questions at the meeting. This strategy was suggested by a member of the group in an e-mail:

[An all-candidates meeting] would be more effective if coordinated with the publishing of the ... questionnaire responses—a couple of nights later strikes me as potentially very effective as it would offer a chance for candidates to expand on their ... answers ... citizens would have these responses in hand and be able to further grill candidates on how they answered. (Oct. 7, 2005)

This strategy is endorsed by three other groups that made up the coalition hosting the all-candidates meeting. The Green Group advisor also participates,

supporting the extension of the report card strategy at the public meeting, as a way of “continuing outreach/education around the election” (Oct. 13, 2005). This view is echoed by the president, who suggests building on the report card strategy by adding “questions that relate to sustainability. Not necessarily similar to those we are asking for our ad” (Oct. 14, 2005). In preparation for the meeting, the president asks for the advisor’s feedback in an e-mail, for example, on a question about an acquisition budget for natural areas: “I thought that a question relating to the amount that [the city] is setting aside for natural areas parks ... would be good. In ‘04 [the incumbent mayor] ... lowered that amount to 50% without any explanation ... There is not now a designation or acquisition budget for natural areas parks” (Nov. 6, 2005).

Shaping their discourse again, the advisor responds by e-mail with suggestions for revision, to give the questions more focus and punch. Replacing the president’s language, he offers a series of pointed questions: “There is a ton of good info in your [question]. Why not zero in on some of that? For ex. ‘Why does [the city] NOT have an acquisition budget for natural area parks, and would candidates put one in place? If so, how much is the city willing to invest in securing natural areas ... ?’” (Nov. 7, 2005). His advice cuts through the details and expressions of blame. In his e-mail, he also advises the president to “check out the web for the detail[ed] responses by some of the candidates” that were insufficiently “concrete,” and “to try to nail the candidates down to some solid idea” (Nov. 7, 2005). His advice on rhetorical and research strategies, thus, helps put the group on a more even discursive field with the candidates. It helps build the group’s public profile and identity as a credible player in the election campaign.

“The Community Livability All-Candidates Meeting” was attended by more than 150 people from all areas of the city and the local media. It was moderated by the editor of one of the local newspapers, who was known to be critical of the city’s development processes, and whom the coalition had invited to take on this role. Newspapers carried the meeting’s collective message, not surprisingly reifying the key content, or “statement,” of the expressed concern that natural areas are being developed without public input: “The ... majority on council has silenced critics, shut down committees and suppressed reports in its zeal to speed development at the cost of green space and wildlife, challengers charged at an all-candidates forum Nov. 9” (Nov. 16, 2005). The process of developing the questions, publishing the results, and exploiting them at the all-candidates meeting was part of an accumulation of expressed discontent and growing political capital among environmentalist and other groups in the community. Just as the mayoral candidate, who is pro-development, formulates this statement of blocked public input to garner votes, by emphasizing the need for public input for “good” development, local newspapers formulate the statement to stir up

controversy by emphasizing the current mayor's abrogation of democratic processes that would ratify public input. This statement becomes critical content and a forceful node of knowledge/power. It constitutes the elements of discourse that agents have repeated and reproduced, through strategy and opportunism. Participants who re-formulate these linguistic expressions can build knowledge by shaping the statements that will become the prevailing account of events in the community. If favorable events occur, this built account can be synchronized with, and incorporated into, a change in the linguistic marketplace. As part of the pre-election momentum, the group can be seen shaping an identity and discourse in preparation for a possible change in city governance, and an accompanying shift in participation framework and speaking positions. This possibility is realized through the incumbent mayor's defeat.

Taking Up a Speaking Position within a Reconfigured Participation Framework

The structural changes at the institutional level, brought on in this case by the election, as "an exercise in power" (Gregory, 2001, p. 146), rewarded the risk of uncertainty and afforded the group a positioning opportunity on which it was then able to capitalize. As Holland and Lave (2001) conclude, "the structuring of social existence" is a "historical process": "both the continuity and the transformation of social life are ongoing, uncertain projects" (p. 4). They emphasize the productive role of uncertainty in this process, pointing out that it is "the generativity of cultural practices" that creates "alternative subjectivities" which "introduce uncertainty—wild cards of a sort—into the careers of local contentious practice" (p. 9). The group had fashioned itself an identity and network of city connections that helped create the conditions of possibility for a stronger speaking position. With the election, it was positioned then to "fit" productively into the new participation framework of civic politics. The group thus achieved "acceptability" in the new "market" of city politics (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 81): having achieved sufficient political capital, when the city's participation framework shifts, it strategically attuned its identity work to find a speaking place within the changed market. It was also able to structure its social existence so as to retain the continuity of its activist identity even through its evolving civic identity.

The election, in fact, changed the footing possibilities not only for the group but also for the city staff, allowing both more latitude for expressing dissent and providing input into land use decisions. For example, after the election some city staff were uncharacteristically forthright about their own lack of influence under the previous mayor. Before the election, members of the group had been harshly critical of city staff for their silence and compliance with the mayor-in-council. In a typical comment at the time a member decried a known city engineer's public

comments on protecting wildlife: “He’s got an engineering degree ... he is saying things that he has to know is [sic] wrong,” to which another added, “It’s either do that, or lose his job” (July 28, 2005). Three months after the election, however, at one of the group’s own meetings, invited engineering staff (including the engineer referred to above) acknowledged the repressive political climate of the former mayor’s regime. They reported that they had always wanted to include consideration of fish and streams in their work with developers, but had not been permitted to do so: “We’ve been arguing this for years ... but basically we’ve been told what to do” and “We just have to follow the rules, so to speak” (February 21, 2006). They referred to “what the previous council did” (excluding riparian areas regulations from developer permits) and divulged that “there were some weird deals [with developers] ... some things got done that shouldn’t have gotten done” (February 21, 2006).

The group itself now also has more official input into city initiatives. For example, the president reports that the engineers have incorporated the group’s written recommendations into a memo to the new mayor-in-council; “I found out that they in fact have agreed to what we were suggesting in the letter” (April 18, 2006). Their new footing with the engineering department also disposes the group to sometimes curb its extreme positions. For example, at the same meeting, when one member suggested verifying this input by trying to obtain the memo in question through a “freedom of information request,” another member counseled against such an action: “if we go making a fuss about the memo then we will destroy any trust which is built up between him [the engineer] and us” (April 18, 2006). Such desire for and recognition of the importance of “trust” is a significant move for the group, for it signals a change from the usual public skepticism of institutional authority. The group seems to be engaged in a central element of organizational learning, which Wynne (1992) describes as “the developing identity of the organization itself, through deeper appreciation of relations with others” (p. 293).

The group’s growing influence on decision-making is also evident in the city’s official invitations to provide input at public hearings and other meetings. The ground for this change had been laid during the run-up to the election, as group members met the mayor-to-be at public meetings, and established good relations with three environmentally friendly councilors who were re-elected. With other community groups, the group was later invited to attend public meetings on new development projects. For example, in February 2006, the group was invited to city hall, as one of 40 community groups, to present revisions to a stronger tree bylaw, which council finally approved. While one member is still privately skeptical, cautioning, “Let’s see if they’re willing to implement it fully at the council level” (February 22, 2006), he also expresses public optimism in a regular column he writes for one of the local newspapers, in which he praises this “encouraging and praise-worthy administrative change” (April 22, 2006).

Group members also expressed their sense of being part of a positive shift in city politics. At the March 2006 meeting, for example, comments included the following: “[the mayor—by first name] seems to be taking a new approach about ... new development”; “A light went on”; and “We might make it to the twentieth century.” A local newspaper also reports that a councilor, who was part of the former mayor’s team, voted against the old team “on a controversial commercial development” so that the remaining team members were “stranded by the new councilors, who sided with ... the [new] mayor.” The article reports that “[the councilor] believes gone are the days of block voting on issues, and while the party remains pro-development, it will be ‘good development’ that gets his support” (May 13, 2006).

The change in the group’s speaking rights is signaled in other ways as well. Its official input on development projects is also now duly recorded by the media. For example, local newspapers reported on its stance on a major bridge and residential development proposal: “[The group] is calling for an independent study showing if in fact congestion would be relieved by the [bridge expansion]” (March 29, 2006). Moreover, the new mayor invites the group to become a member of the first Mayor’s Community Association Advisory Committee. The invitation is, at least ostensibly, recognition of the increased value of the group’s political capital. The mayor registered their value in the letter of invitation: “As a community group you are closest to the issues that affect your community. Your involvement has provided you with a thorough and unique understanding of the history, issues and people at the grass-roots level” (April 25, 2006). He wrote that he would like them to “keep [him] apprised of” and to “advise [him]” on “action” to address “public concerns” (April 25, 2006).

Multiple Discourses and Identities

A particularly significant finding of this study is that this civic identity does not eclipse the group’s more extreme language, which is still frequent and persistent. It is alive and well, especially in the back regions of their meetings, where group members do not censor activist expressions, even when the presence of guests at its meetings renders their remarks public. The theme of councilors’ disinterest also persists in comments like “it’s exactly as if you’d never been there at all” and “I think [the questionnaires] go to the shredder,” as follows:

Member 1: Public hearings, these displays, poster boards. They listen to what you have to say and say, thank you very much.

Member 2: And do what they want.

Member 1: And tomorrow it's exactly as if you'd never been there at all.

Member 2: They DNP it. They document ... and then they proceed. They document what the public says to them and then they proceed.

Member 1: And ... they ask you to fill out questionnaires. And so, what happens to those questionnaires. I think they go to the shredder or something [laughter]. (March 22, 2006)

The co-existence of these identities is now sometimes a tolerated feature of language in discussions with government representatives. At a post-election monthly meeting, for example, two invited representatives of the provincial Ministry of Transportation clearly came prepared to listen and respond to confrontational expressions and questions from the group, which they negotiated with humor, respect, and patience. They were giving a presentation on a major highways project, which included the bridge expansion, during which many members became confrontational towards the Ministry representatives. In response to a Power-Point slide showing an "artist's concept" of a nine-lane bridge, one member interjected: "Why don't you show it realistically" with the "congested cars" and "pollution" instead of "all the green?" (May 16, 2006). He accused the Ministry representatives of "green washing" the project, and added sarcastically, "nice paint job" (May 16, 2006). Perhaps members felt entitled to adopt such discourse in the back region of their own meeting place, but in this case it was being offered for wider public consumption.

CONCLUSION

The features of activist discourse apparent in members' comments occur even as they are making serious efforts to shape their public discourse for civic presentability, and as they are permitted increasingly greater speaking rights with the city staff, councilors, and mayor. The anger, cynicism, ridicule, and humor that accompany members' complaints about not being heard persist as features of activist discourse. Like many environmentalist groups, they see themselves as mavericks (even saviors of the environment), lone heroes on the frontiers of the environmentalist versus development battle, advocates for a pristine and victimized nature, and entitled to their anger. For example, at a post-election executive meeting, members discuss the final public hearing on the new tree bylaw that

has just taken place. In the process, they clearly enjoy vilifying and ridiculing the head of city planning:

Member 1: That's the problem. [The planner] and his living documents.

Chair: Yes. [laughs]

Member 2: He's so pleasant when you talk to him, isn't he?

Member 1: Yeah.

Member 2: He's a weasel. [laughter]

Member 1: That's a very good description of him, actually.

Chair: Weasel.

Member 1: I was trying to put my finger on it. (March 7, 2006)

Such aspersions are a common ritual of bonding and identity affirmation. They belong here to the master narrative of the environmentalist world and are important for the group's sense of identity and for their motivation and hope, even when they continue to express cynicism and question the point of their actions.

Eruptions of activist discourse, thus, often function to sustain an activist identity and the investment of passion in a cause. Such responses can reinforce the environmentalist mythos and reinvigorate identification with the passion and belief in their cause. They are an important "assertion" of a different set of relations of symbolic power, a "linguistic counter-legitimacy" expressed in a "space" where "dominant individuals are ... excluded, at least symbolically" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 98). Eruptions of activist discourse are also often legitimate expressions of the "public disquiet" (Eden, 1996, p. 196) that is stirred by reports of environmental destruction and government inaction. They are a response to institutional inertia and deafness—a response that manifests as mistrust and urgency at the local level. These explanations may, in part, account for why there can be, in enduring struggles, the tense co-existence of both activist and civic discourses. They may also point to the critical role of marginal identities in postmodern change and to the valuing of the activist expressions of transgressive identities, which reflect a subversive and differently valued state of relations of symbolic power.

The risk for the group is that, in its struggle for the environment, as it reconstitutes itself in a changed participation framework, reconstructions of its activist identity may in turn, paradoxically, serve to contain its oppositional nature. The risk is that by reinforcing its activist identity as “difference,” its marginality will become reinscribed, for example, in the mayor’s words, as a “grass-roots” group. The risk is that such identifiers can become inserted in the expression of a political, unitary discourse, at once drawing the speaker’s legitimacy from the group and performing an act of re-subjugation (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 129). As Kearney (2001) reminds us, the reproduction of difference arises not only through “institutions of inequality (the state and its agencies)” but it is also self-generated due to “the habitual actions of persons in their resistance to such structured inequality” (p. 261). The challenge for such groups is to “moderate the dialogic process” to achieve a net gain in the linguistic and political marketplace (Kearney, 2001, p. 276). Managing these identities involves the careful deployment of rhetorical-discursive strategies that maximize the gains derived from an institutional speaking position and minimize the losses incurred through the expressions of a transgressive discourse.

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