

# Designing Place by Holding Space:

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Transformative Communication as a Guide for the Communicative  
Practice of Participatory Place-making

A Thesis Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Landscape Architecture

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# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>List of Tables and Figures</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<u>Context: A World of Relationships</u> .....	8
<u>Problem: Lack of Guidance in Communicative Practice</u> .....	9
<u>Response: Making the implicit explicit</u> .....	10
<u>Document Roadmap</u> .....	11
<b>Chapter 2: Methodology</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<u>Organic Inquiry</u> .....	12
Understanding the Method .....	12
<u>Project Phases</u> .....	18
Phase 1: Project Groundwork .....	18
Phase 2: Exploring Programs and Literature .....	19
Phase 3: Experiencing Dialogue .....	20
Phase 4: Synthesizing and Reflecting on Experience .....	27
<b>Chapter 3: Phase 1- Project Groundwork</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<u>An Adventure in the Art of Expression</u> .....	28
<u>Stories of Discovery and Connection</u> .....	31
The Power of Design .....	31
“People Problems” .....	33
<b>Chapter 4: Phase II - Literature Review</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<u>Postmodernism, Participation, and Power: Arnstein’s Ladder</u> .....	34
Postmodernism .....	34
Participation is Power .....	35
Simple Model, Complex Reality .....	36
<u>Practice is Political</u> .....	38
Change Hurts .....	38
Seeing Beyond the Scope of Work .....	39
<u>Practice is Communicative</u> .....	42
“Wicked Problems” .....	43

The Power to Empower .....	44
<b><u>Chapter 5: Phase III - Experiencing Dialogue</u></b> .....	<b>45</b>
<u>Participatory Programs</u> .....	45
<u>Lessons in Regenerative Leadership</u> .....	45
“The Power of Vulnerability” .....	47
City Repair .....	49
<u>Natural Resources Leadership Institute</u> .....	53
Easy on the People.....	53
The Groan Zone.....	53
Emotional Intelligence .....	54
Empathy: A Key .....	56
<u>Satvatove: Framework of Transformative Communication</u> .....	57
<b><u>Chapter 6: Phase IV - Findings</u></b> .....	<b>59</b>
<u>Reflecting the Process</u> .....	59
<u>Design as Coaching</u> .....	63
<u>Cultivating the Process: Lessons for Application</u> .....	66
<b><u>Chapter 7: Conclusion</u></b> .....	<b>76</b>
<u>In Summary</u> .....	76
<u>Research Directions</u> .....	76
<u>Final Thoughts</u> .....	77
<b><u>Works Cited</u></b> .....	<b>79</b>
<b><u>Appendix A: Permaculture Ethics and Principles</u></b> .....	<b>81</b>
<b><u>Appendix B: NRLI Session Topics and Locations</u></b> .....	<b>82</b>

# List of Tables and Figures

## *Tables*

Table 1: Program Mission & Format.....21  
Table 2: Program Features/Rationale for Inclusion.....22  
Table 3: Timeline of Course & Program Involvement.....23  
Table 4: Participatory Values.....56

## *Figures*

Figure 1 & 2 The Red Box.....29  
Figure 3 Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation.....36  
Figure 4The Groan zone in Decision Making.....54

# Abstract

*Literature on participation across place-making disciplines including design, planning, development, and art indicates the importance of dialogue and communicative action in practice as the “space” in which decisions are made. This communicative space, then, is where much of the “power of design” is exerted. However, it is also indicated in the literature that there is a lack of explicit guidance for practitioners in terms of navigating this communicative aspect of practice (as opposed to more technical aspects of practice). This lack of guidance is problematic because it neglects an opportunity to support practitioners in navigating the ethical and political nature of practice, especially in participatory settings that are particularly communicative. Thus, practice stands to improve by expanding to include more explicit guidance for communicative action of its practitioners. The goal of this project was to develop an experiential understanding of the more elusive and implicit elements of creating dialogue with the intention of developing a more explicit account of those elements that will support higher levels of competence in navigating the communicative work in practice with higher degrees of ethical accountability.*

*Experiences in courses on regenerative design and social permaculture, human dimensions of natural resource decision making, and a set of related courses based on a communicative approach to personal transformation developed a deeper understanding of the nature of communicative practice as the courses’ content related to one another and to the themes and issues in the literature. A sensitive understanding of how to “hold space” for dialogue were a cross cutting theme across the courses. The courses in transformative communication was found most useful in creating an explicit understanding of “what is going on” in communicative action (principles) and how to refine the skills of empathic dialogue (practices). Finally, the project concludes with potential applications for future use of this improved understanding of communication as a vital tool for responsible design practice.*

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## *Context: A World of Relationships*

Charlene Spretnak in her book, *Relational Reality*, asserts that in place of a mechanistic worldview and paradigm, a model that better fits Einstein's relational theory of reality that emerged nearly 100 years ago would understand

*that all entities in the natural world, including us, are thoroughly relational beings of great complexity, who are both composed of and nested within contextual networks of dynamic and reciprocal relationships. We are made entirely of relationships, as is the whole of the natural world. Both the mechanistic and the relational modes of perceptions are ways of seeing the world. They are each a foundational frame of reference, which results in a particular worldview, or paradigm. The relational worldview, however, is a close fit with the relational nature of reality, while the mechanistic worldview is not (author's emphasis) (Spretnak, 2011).*

Assuming this relational model of the world is correct, a framework for being in, creating, and having relationships is important to bring into the "collective consciousness of landscape architecture," as Brown and Jennings (2003) referred to it, because landscapes *are composed of relationships*. Anne Whiston Spirn in her book, *The Language of Landscape* (1998), argues for the importance of learning how to read and understand landscapes in order to understand how to respond to them. She observes that the language we use in communicating with each other is "steeped in landscape," or our embodied experience of the world. She explores the history of the word landscape to reveal that the word implies an interrelatedness of people, their settlements, the land, and everything in between. This interrelatedness between social and physical aspects of landscape is at the heart of landscape architecture.

### *Problem: Lack of Guidance in Communicative Practice*

Taking Spretnak and Spirn's insights together, the importance of understanding relationships and the communication that supports them becomes emphasized. Literature reveals that interpersonal aspects of practice are at least of equal importance as technical aspects. Communication plays a substantial and vital role in the process of design. However, literature reveals that theories of practice tend to gravitate towards more technical approaches for understanding landscapes than interpersonal or communicative ones that are tacit by their very nature.

Additionally, participatory approaches to place-making are becoming more common in practice (Juarez, 2008), and demonstrate not only the communicative aspects of practice, but the political facets as well. Arnstein's point that participation *is* citizen power was part of initiating the discourse on participatory practice and the process of achieving just power distribution in decision making whose affects are broadly felt. Although the assessment of participatory practice has gone on for about 40 years, there is still little consensus as to how best to integrate it design practice as a whole. Taken together, the observations a) that participatory practice is, by nature, both political and communicative, b) that participatory practice is still largely contested and c) that communicative practice bears heavily on decision making in design, but is largely left to implicit rather than explicit understanding emphasize that a more explicit understanding of communicative aspects of practice could support a more responsible practice of design overall.

### *Response: Making the implicit explicit*

The goal of this project was to develop an experiential understanding of the more elusive and implicit elements of creating dialogue with the intention of developing a more explicit account of those elements that will support higher levels of competence in navigating the communicative work in practice with higher degrees of ethical accountability.

Sommerville's (2001) research indicated that communicative practice is largely left to implicit rather than explicit understanding, as mentioned previously, and that the implicit understandings are largely up for practitioners to learn through experience through social learning and observation and/or a process of trial and error. This point highlighted the necessity of creating intentional *experiences of* the creation and process of communication and dialogue in order to develop a personal sense of these implicit elements of creating "dialogical spaces." This inspired the method of engaging in three experience based programs designed to create intentional space for dialogue (and encourage participant learning on how to do so as well).

The challenge of making the "implicit" "explicit" was not always directly possible. The incorporation and weaving together of qualitative descriptions of personal experiences in the programs and observations therein of "what it takes" to hold space for meaningful dialogue work together with connecting concepts with the literature to build clarity where tacit aspects of communication are more difficult to articulate.

## *Document Roadmap*

Chapter 2: Methodology will describe the organic inquiry approach used in the project as well as the four phases of the project. The phases are broken out into chapters as follows here.

Chapter 3: Phase I – Project Groundwork describes the early foundations and groundwork for the experiences, discovery, and questions that founded the project

Chapter 4: Phase II—Literature Review: This chapter discusses the issues in the literature, as well as the most relevant, important, and grounding themes therein. The actual phase of the project included exploring experiential programs along with participatory literature, building a context of understanding, and honing in further on the questions guiding the project as they relate to issues discovered in literature on participation. The chapter functions as a literature review, and leaves the discussion of the programs to other following sections.

Chapter 5: Phase III—Experiencing Dialogue: This phase was about actually experiencing the programs, reflecting, gathering information, comparing, synthesizing, trying on different perspectives in relationship to experience gained and literature. The Chapter functions as an overview of the programs and their content.

Chapter 6: Phase IV—Findings: This chapter is about articulating overarching lessons and principles of holding space for dialogue and a vision for participatory practice that applies the principles of Transformative Communication and other lessons learned in Phase III.

Chapter 7: Conclusions: This chapter summarizes lessons learned and looks at future directions for research and exploration around what has been discovered in this project.

# Chapter 2: Methodology

## Organic Inquiry

### *Understanding the Method*

The methodology used to create this project was the qualitative method of organic inquiry. Not typical for landscape architecture projects, it is important to delve into what it is and to convey the reasoning behind the choice. Clements, Ettling, Jenett, and Shields describe this methodology in their book, *If Research were Sacred—An Organic Methodology*:

Organic inquiry is a qualitative methodology which acknowledges that every research study has an inherent and **expanding nature** [emphasis added] which may be realized through subjective and intuitive methods (1998).

Moving from questions that sprang at the confluence of my previous work in the art studio and more current work in and around landscape architecture, the progression of this project was of an organic, expanding nature that will be conveyed through the narrative accounts of the project. It has been organic in that each phase, decision, and experience has had a natural, spontaneous, and inter-connected quality.

The project's expanding nature is reflected in my own expansion, learning, and growth into the topic of power and dialogue. The project grew from seemingly tiny moments in time and experience that could easily have been looked over or forgotten, but holding them in my consciousness, they have transformed (expanded) into questions that have changed how I view what professional practice, and even what life can be. The importance of deeply understanding dialogue was revealed to me through the experiences in studio classes and reflections on the literature on participation and power. The process of seeking this understanding is the

“primary material” of this study, in reference to the quotation on organic inquiry above, that I as researcher aimed to “harvest essential wisdom from.” I have acted as the primary participant, weaving together the unique combination of experiences and insights described here, namely from art, landscape architecture, transformative communication, and other experiences.

While many studies build credibility by having a larger pool of participants, this project seeks to excavate deeply interior realities of dialogue and how it applies to the themes of power and place-making in landscape architecture. Using myself as a subject made the most sense in the interest of having full access to internal experience, and the ability to make connections between experience and literature with awareness of what aspects of experience might be most relevant to the project. Although it can certainly be seen as a limiting factor in the work, it is important to note that the project does not, once again, seek to prove or generalize. Also, it would have been logistically challenging to have other participants go through the intensive programs I have immersed myself in to do this work. The organic, whole nature of a single experience works as a narrative to facilitate the sharing of experience and insight in a relatable, potentially transformative way.

### **Purpose of Organic Inquiry**

The goal of organic inquiry is not to prove or disprove a hypothesis, but rather, to create and share transformation, or change in the reader:

Rather than aiming at generalized and replicable results, organic inquiry seeks to present the data and analysis in such a way that the individual reader may interact with it and be personally transformed (1998).

Dialogue is almost always unique based on its context and timing, content, participants, and relationship among participants and how they relate to power. Consider the familiar use of case studies of sites in landscape architecture; they can lend to insights about principles of approach to other sites and situations, but are not easily generalizable because of the unique and specific characteristics of each site. A deep understanding of dialogue, it seems, may be difficult to grasp with methods that seek replicable results, assuming perhaps more predictability than what actually exists. Instead, transformation of how an individual reader relates to the experience of authentic dialogue through specific, and multi-modal (encompassing all modes of human experience as will be explained shortly) story sharing is, I will argue, a powerful and effective means of response to Sommerville's (2001) call for getting explicit about communicative aspects of practice, and to the other calls for and references to dialogue in the literature that stop at promoting its practice, but do not share, in depth, what it takes to do so.

### **Experience as Instrument**

In this way, my experiences with dialogue become a component of the work as

Clements et al., explain:

The methodology views the researcher's own experience and story as the instrument of the study. Just as a qualitative instrument measures data, the story and the ongoing experience of the primary researcher becomes the tool of measurement of organic data and the means by which the reader may engage with the results...

Where most qualitative research insists that the researcher identify and bracket her or his assumptions and presuppositions to achieve a state that is free of personal judgment, organic inquiry depends on the researcher's ability to hold her or his personal experience, both of the topic and of the progress of the research itself, in the foreground as the data are gathered and analyzed and to consciously use it as the vehicle for analysis of the data (1998).

So by sharing the experiences and the observations of experiences had doing this work, I intend to convey some of what exclusively rational approaches miss. This is an important step in bringing clarity to the tacit, implicit dimensions of dialogue and power.

To capture what exclusively rational approaches tend to exclude, Clements et al., speak about four modes of experience that are important both in assessing the organic data, or phenomenon as they occur, and expressing the experience as results:

*Feeling, intuitive, creative and thinking modes are all essential tools* [emphasis added] in evaluating data as well as in expressing the results. These four styles of investigation... honor not only linear and rational approaches but also subjective and holistic ones. Using personal stories allows the researcher to use all four of these methods in order to inform the reader on an experiential as well as an intellectual level. This widens the opportunity for individual transformation that is seen as the goal of organic inquiry (1998).

The line of inquiry in this project, as alluded to before, is rooted in my own previous experience with the artistic exploration of “human power.” Organic inquiry, because it acknowledges and holds in reverence “all modes of human experience,” accommodates the inclusion of that creative artistic process, and the method’s “expansive” nature renders it malleable enough to take that foundation and allow it to grow with deeper exploration into experiencing the tacit aspects of power and dialogue, and be informed by existing literature on participation in landscape architecture and related fields as they point toward these topics. This project utilizes the “intuitive, creative, feeling and thinking modes” integral to organic inquiry to synthesize the series of experiences, observations, questions, and insights that arose in pursuing questions meaningful on a professional and a personal level. In this way, I aspire to share this culmination of a chapter in a personal journey in a way that becomes relevant to the larger community of practice.

In beginning this project, I had an intention to get to the heart of the matter that I sensed were the “people problems,” as described before. I did not know, starting out, that the journey would go where it did. This is a key trait of the organic method:

As the name implies, the method of each organic study is a creative process and therefore the researcher is called to pay attention to the suggestions of the inner voice of the research itself which speaks by way of dreams, coincidences, or intuitive knowing and to adjust the operation of the method accordingly. The method is never frozen but is constantly responding to the creative shouts and whispers of the primary wisdom of the research itself.

Engaging with the unexpected and trusting the process is appropriate to the exploration of power and dialogue because the nature of dialogue itself is intuitive and much like a dance that unfolds with expression. To truly engage, to allow one’s self to be changed by either an organic process of inquiry or an authentic dialogue, does, as Kelly and Van Vlaenderen offer (1995), require one to be open to stepping in unexpected directions, leading to unknown, unfamiliar territory. Bringing Clements et al.’s method of organic inquiry to the table in landscape architecture is itself somewhat a discovery. Utilizing it here is, in a way, an argument that the innermost experiences of being human are not only legitimate, but relevant to the work of place-making, of establishing and protecting quality of life.

As Clements, et al., describe how organic inquiry emerged from the basis of transpersonal psychology, distinct from other veins of the discipline because it stands not only to honor all modes of experience, but to recognize the relevance one individual’s experience can have for others:

Organic inquiry has emerged out of this transpersonal movement's call to consciousness which acknowledges the *inseparability of one individual's experiences and actions from those of the greater community* [emphasis added] and thereby calls for impeccable honesty and responsibility instead of a sense of superiority or competition. This requires an attitude of reverence toward all aspects of the research (1998).

In this way, I offer what follows, again, not to prove any theory, or judge participatory and communicative practice as it is. Instead, it is to offer my own transformational learning about dialogue and power so that those who read it may be impacted rather than persuaded. It is fitting to apply a methodology that emerged from transpersonal psychology to examine aspects of practice that are particularly human, but not particularly concrete.

To take Eversole (2012), Kelly and Van Vlaenderen (1995), and Innes (1999) seriously about dialogue requiring all participants to be open to change, I wanted to explore what that actually means. Doing so has not been a linear process but a tumultuous and personally challenging one that I sometimes lost track of myself, but always to find it freshly again with new eyes and deeper meaning. The work is offered not just as a toolbox or even a set of principles but as a mirror in which other practitioners engaging in participatory work and interested in developing the skill of creating dialogue may reflect on for their own direction and understanding. Clements et al., observe that:

...transformation may be a small insight or a major revisioning of oneself. The researcher serves as the facilitator between the primary material and each reader. She or he aims at harvesting some part of the essential wisdom of the topic and directly presenting it to the individual reader by way of stories which re-create the experiences...

I studied participation by participating in programs that held promising direction. I studied dialogue by learning to create supportive, transformative dialogue. I studied community development by using communicative skills I learned to build and foster community. And, I studied power by learning to experience my own.

To end this section on organic inquiry and its use in this project, there is one last quote from Clements et al. that is important, because it asks you, the reader, to engage as a participant in reading, to hold open the possibility of being changed in the process:

This goal of transformation calls for a greater level of participation than is usual for a reader of research. Rather than reviewing the introduction and the results, the reader must read the research as if it were a novel, story by story (1998).

Befitting Eversole's (2012) call to remake participation such that all who are involved are open to seeing new perspectives and potentially allowing themselves to be changed, this method of inquiry asks the same of those with whom its results are shared.

In summary, organic inquiry is practically appropriate for this project because it acknowledges parts of human experience relevant to the topic and so allows for the layering of the different modes of experience. The method, which aims for personal transformation supports the goal of the project to generate a deeper understanding of how to create authentic dialogue while navigating power dynamics, especially in decision making contexts like participatory processes in landscape architecture and related fields. Reaching into the subjective and intuitive realms is important in drawing out some of the more tacit aspects of communicative practice as Sommerville (2001) points out, and creating a more explicit basis for understanding. Exploring something tacit requires using modes of experience and understanding beyond just the rational.

## Project Phases

### *Phase 1: Project Groundwork*

To give an understanding of the organic nature of this process, a brief background of its origins follows below. The story will be returned to in the discussion, but here it provides a

sense of the project's origins that further supports the utilization of a creative, intuitive method.

The essence of the exploration of power and potential carried over from the red box art project into the present work. In that instance, it was an almost exclusively personal journey where I, through an intuitive process, created an expression of power and fear that spoke to a deeply human experience, dare I say a universal one. From there (with a few steps in between) I had the idea of taking what I had learned to further explore the use of human power to “sculpt reality:” to create environments by studying landscape architecture. In the emerging process of being in the question while in the landscape architecture program, I discovered that designing physical space was only part of the picture.

Experiences and observations about the power of design and “people problems” discussed in Chapter 3 led to questions that were the motivating seeds of inspiration for this project. Both topics of power and people steered the project toward the second phase where I discovered that gaining a deeper, experiential understanding of dialogue would be the additional layer that the present project explores.

### *Phase 2: Exploring Programs and Literature*

The second phase included a review of literature on participation across several fields and some preliminary participation in experience based courses previous to deciding the project would come to be largely based on those programs (for a full timeline, see Table 3).

This first pass through the literature was primarily experienced by me, the researcher, conceptually, or in the thinking mode of experience. The concepts, themes, and issues in the literature, complemented by experience in the Regenerative Leadership Institute (RLI) course

and the Satvatove Foundational course (both to be described in the next section) showed me where a potential “gap” was around dialogue.

### *Phase 3: Experiencing Dialogue*

To accommodate the exploration of the seemingly elusive facets of “what works” in communicative practice, it made sense to look outside of the discipline since (after all, Sommerville’s study revealed ambiguity around communicative aspects, and so, looking elsewhere for guidance was both a logical and an intuitive step). I engaged in experience based programs that would offer contexts for that exploration.

Some organic researchers immerse themselves in a text or music, and relate their story of experience of that content. Three experience based programs, the literature on participation, and related studio experiences serve as the core content here that I as researcher encounter and relate sometimes in stories and sometimes in more traditional academic prose to “facilitate” a deeper understanding of the experience of authentic dialogue.

The three programs this project engages with emerged in my experience as part of the organic process, but were also intentionally chosen based on their qualities and the types of content and experience they offered individually and together. A chart with descriptions of each can be seen in Table 1, followed by Table 2 that summarizes the rationale for each program’s inclusion in the project, and Table 3 that presents a graphic timeline of my participation in each of the programs. Following the tables are written descriptions of each one.

Table 1: Program Mission and Format

Program:	MLA Program	Regenerative Leadership Institute	Satvatove School of Transformative Communication	UF/IFAS Natural Resources Leadership Institute
Mission	The mission of the department of landscape architecture is to advance the ethical, creative, and skillful application of the art and the science of planning and designing urban, rural and natural environments.”	[To cultivate] regenerative leadership and social permaculture – the science and art of developing healthy communities. In order to build a healthy, thriving beautiful world, we must first begin by truly acknowledging the root causes of the challenges that face us.	Personal transformation through empowered communication, courageous introspection, and purposeful action.	The development of a trained network of professionals prepared to effectively address natural resource issues through conflict management and collaborative leadership.
Format:	3 year curriculum to prepare students for professional practice of landscape architecture	Two 10-day intensive seminars on permaculture principles and design, and regenerative practices as they broadly apply to human endeavors	-3 day course on skills of transformative communication; -6 day course on application of skills; -72 hour training in principles and practices; -6 month program in support of real world application	3 days/month for 8 months place based seminar on facilitating consensus and conflict management in natural resource decision making contexts
Dates:	Summer 2010 – Spring 2013	July 2011 & August 2012	October 2012 – March 2014	August 2012 – April 2013

**Table 2: Program Features / Rationale for Inclusion**

<b>Program Feature</b> → ↓	<b>MLA Program</b>	<b>Regenerative Leadership Institute</b>	<b>Satvatove School of Transformative Communication</b>	<b>UF/IFAS Natural Resources Leadership Institute</b>
Interpersonal / Social Emphasis	-	+	+	+
Design Oriented	+	+	-	-
Part of Academic Institution	+	-	-	+
Explicit Ethical Framework	(+/-) <sup>1</sup>	+	+	+
Emotional Learning Component	-	+	+	(+/-) <sup>2</sup>
Environmental Emphasis	+	+	-	+

<sup>1</sup> Brown and Jennings point out the ambiguity in professional practice code of ethics for landscape architecture

<sup>2</sup> Emotional intelligence and the important role of emotion was discussed, but this was left to conceptual, cognitive approaches, as common in academia, rather than taking the motion to create experience to learn from.

**Table 3: Timeline of Course & Program Involvement**

Time Line:	Fall 2007	Fall 2010	Spring 2011	Summer 2011	Fall 2011	Spring 2012	Summer 2012	Fall 2012	Spring 2013	Summer 2013	Fall 2013	Spring 2014	
Project Activities & Program Involvement	- Core Curriculum of MLA Program -												
	Art Studio: Red Box/ Power	Thesis Development											
	Community Design Studio: The power & responsibility of design	Planting Design Studio: "People Problems"	RLI				RLI						
						Superfund Meetings		Superfund Meetings					
									NRLI				
					Training in Transformative Communication								
					3 Day Foundational Course			Coach Training Program (PPTC)				Staffing Courses	
									6 Day Advanced Seminar	LMP, bringing principles into life outside seminars			
										SCPP 10: Skill practice	SCPP 11: Skill practice		
		Phase I			Phase II			Phase III & IV					

## **Regenerative Leadership Institute**

The first of the three was a permaculture design course called Regenerative Leadership Institute (RLI). This 10 day workshop was a Permaculture Design Course held in Eugene, Oregon in 2011 and outside of Eugene in 2012. The program defines permaculture as “is a regenerative design science rooted in the patterns of nature, with practical applications that extend far beyond organic farming into every area of our lives,” and social permaculture, as “the art and science of developing healthy communities.” The core curriculum covered permaculture basics, and the principles and ethics as outlined in Bill Mollison’s *Permaculture Design Manual*. The Regenerative Leadership Institute’s stance on the over-arching applicability of permaculture is that, “As a holistic design science, regenerative permaculture design is a powerful paradigm of sustainability for governments, businesses, cities, communities and relationships<sup>3</sup>.”

I took the course twice. The first time was eye opening and felt like a step in the direction of finding solutions for the social aspects of design, or the “people problems.” Power, responsibility, and ethics were strong themes throughout the course, based on permaculture (the principles and ethics of which can be found in Appendix A). The case study in this project, Mark Lakeman’s City Repair project, was discovered in this course where Mark gave a presentation of his work, and stayed to talk. I returned to RLI for a second time as an intern to re-engage with the social permaculture elements of the course that inspired some of the foundations for the project. Its basis in permaculture design made it an easy choice to include because design practice was a focal theme in the curriculum along with the topics of social and interpersonal issues, and discussions of power and ethics. Experiencing this course was

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<sup>3</sup> Quotes were taken from course website in 2012. Program name and course website content have changed since then.

foundational in that it contained all of the major elements relevant to this project:

regenerative design supported by explicit communicative practice and open acknowledgment of power differences and dynamics.

### **UF/IFAS's Natural Resource Leadership Institute (NRLI)**

The Natural Resources Leadership Institute (NRLI) was chosen based on its emphasis on the human dimension of natural resource issues, which seemed to be a promising avenue to deepen my understanding of “people problems” and dialogue. NRLI is a program that is experienced over nine months. For the first eight months, participants (called “fellows”) meet over 3 days once per month in a different location in Florida to learn about different natural resource issues and “collaborative solutions” to them (see listing of session locations and topics in Appendix B). The content is described succinctly in the course brochure available on the course website:

Institute Fellows study personal and group leadership skills, communication skills and conflict management techniques while learning about important environmental issues, concepts and policy from a variety of perspectives. Sessions also include tours of key natural resource sites around the state and discussions with citizens, managers, leaders, and policy-makers directly involved in natural resource decision-making (Natural Resources Leadership Institute Brochure).

Thus, the program’s relevance to the project is on several fronts. Its existence, and the thriving interest of participants in the program indicates the importance of addressing human dimensions of conflict or decision making that involves natural resources. The program not only provided tools for managing people and conflict more effectively, but it also offered the opportunity to engage with real world communities who have made natural resource decisions in more or less ways. While these scenarios had little to do with design directly, the issues covered and skills offered were highly relevant to topics of the design and planning professions.

### **Satvatove: A Paradigm of Transformative Communication**

I found Satvatove in a moment when the vision of “sculpting reality” towards regenerative futures was difficult to see. As mentioned above, the first Satvatove course I took was previous to honing in on the specific nature of this project, and was in some ways an inspiration for the direction it took.

Created by Dr. David Wolfe, the courses are designed to share principles and practices of what he calls transformative communication. The practices and principles are taught didactically some of the time, but primarily the courses and seminars are spent creating experiences in which to apply the practices and principles. Participants have the opportunity to experiment with the skills, and often come to higher levels of self-awareness. A growing self-awareness is key in the transformation of “transformative communication.” Once I can see myself, my blind spots, what I am doing and creating that I was previously unaware of, I am better equipped to make adjustments accordingly to create more satisfying results with my communication.

The 3-day Foundational Course that I took during Phase 3 earns its title because the primary objective in the seminar is to teach the principles of transformative communication, and give some practical experience with each piece, creating a foundation of understanding, skills, and experience in participants. During Phase 4, I chose to participate in the courses, seeing potential value in them in relationship to the project and the exploration of dialogue.

Other courses and programs I participated are described as follows. The 6-day course is designed to give deep, highly personal experiences of using and applying the skills and principles. The post-advanced course, or Life Mastery Program (LMP) is a structure designed to support participants to carry what they have gained in the courses into their lives if they so

choose. The coach training program (PPTC) is a 72 hour course designed to spend more time with the content and give participants more practice to sharpen their use of the skills. The Satvatove Coach Partners Program is a follow up program to the coach training, connecting international students of the course to continue to practice engaging one another in practicing the skills and giving and receiving feedback to improve.

#### *Phase 4: Synthesizing and Reflecting on Experience*

Finally, the last phase was to synthesize what had been learned in the three programs, reflect on how they relate to the context of participation and landscape architecture, and what from these experiences can be offered in potential applications moving forward that may benefit professionals who are engaging in interpersonal work.

# Chapter 3: Phase I - Project Groundwork

## **An Adventure in the Art of Expression**

The story of this project actually begins, as alluded to before, in an art studio course I took as an undergraduate art student. As an undergraduate, I made an agreement with myself that I would follow my curiosity rather than work on a degree toward any particular career, and that I would eventually get a degree. As a result, I began as an art student, moving to psychology, and finally philosophy to give a sense of the larger brush strokes in the picture. I was searching for a meaningful way of life, for meaning in life.

The story I am setting up for was one of the most poignant moments in my time at the University of Kentucky. In a conceptual sculpture class, as a final project, I was assigned to create an urn for what I thought was the most important thing or person to me. After some introspection, I decided to build an urn for human power and potential. I went into the work not knowing what the end result would be. There was both a light and a dark side to this decision. The light side was allowing the form to intuitively take shape, trusting the process and allowing it to be whatever it would be. The dark side was self-created blindness of the final product, a sense of removal from the whole picture I was creating. I had an idea of what it would look like, but I was unable to grasp the impact it would have on a viewer. I wasn't fully in touch with how effective or ineffective the final product would be for the audience or me.

I ended up with a 4 ½' x 4 ½' ply-board box, painted blood red, and bound together around the edges with chain looped through drilled holes around each facet's perimeter And some breathing holes in the center of each facet, of course; never mind that it was beginning to look more and more like a cage for a wild animal. (See Figure 1 & 2) For the presentation, I

planned to put myself inside of the box and push it down the street. I speculated that perhaps I could make it several miles to the University from my duplex garage, or at least down the street.

The result was animalistic and raw. Weighing in at about 98 pounds at the time, the box nearly had the better of me. It took all of my strength—all of my power—to tip the box over—once—much less roll the thing down the street. My memory likely serves as a poor representation of actual time it took to capsize the cube, it felt like hours. It was likely about fifteen to twenty minutes of grunting, screaming, panting, anger, tears, fear, embarrassment (what if I couldn't do it? What if I failed? What would that say for human power and potential? What if I just look like an idiot right now?), and being shaken to my own core. I hadn't the slightest precognition that the experience would be what it was, which I now find quite hilarious because the genuine expression, the unexpected experience, was what made the work powerful, moving, and effective—even if it was a touch disturbing.



**Figure 1 & 2: The Red Box**

Being inside the box, I got to experience real emotions, real fear, and also to push through it, finding the will, the power inside of me not to give up until I tipped that box over. After tipping it over, my classmates rushed to help cut upon some of the chains that held the box together (they had helped close the chain links when after I entered the box, and I had planned no exit strategy). I squeezed out at as soon as the opening was big enough, like a birth. Watching the video of the event, I was unable to connect with what I had created. Actually until about last week (the first week of March, 2014) I stood in some ambiguity with it, in judgment of myself, in misunderstanding my own creation, in mistrust of my own intuitive process, and in blindness to my own power as an artist and as a person. I was afraid of what I had created, what I expressed without fully meaning to. So I did what any person lost in self-created terror would do: I ran from it. I quit pursuing art in school and moved to psychology. Perhaps I thought I needed fixing, that this was an expression of things that I did not want to look at.

So this is where the story of the project that pursues questions of participation, power, and dialogue began. Why on earth is this relevant and how is it related to the exploration of dialogue and power in landscape architecture? Well. I encourage the reader to stay with the organic method as it unfolds. For now, it is enough to relate that this was a flag pole in my experience of power, my own awareness of how important I felt it was, and a revealing moment in the creation of *my* relationship with power. This becomes increasingly relevant as the work continues.

I gravitated finally towards a degree in philosophy where some of my lingering questions from artistic exploration could be investigated from a safer distance—cognitively,

rationally, analytically. I discovered environmental philosophy and took a class to learn more about sustainability. This was when I discovered that landscape architecture might be the avenue to explore human power to shape environments—to “sculpt reality,” I thought. That is what I was after.

Entering into the MLA program, not unlike getting into the red box, was overwhelming. It took some time before I would rediscover my original intention for studying landscape architecture in the first place. It was in the first few semesters, however, that the more specific questions that grounded this project emerged from experiences related to landscape architecture studio course work. Two moments in particular carved out the questions in my mind, which are highlighted in the next section.

## **Stories of Discovery and Connection**

The foundation of this project was built from pursuing questions that sprang from engagement with landscape design studio work in the MLA program at the University of Florida. These questions directed the initial literature search. The dynamic between these initial questions and findings from the literature, along with other experiences as mentioned in the methodology section, informed the development of the primary question and how it would be approached. The following section tells the story of the observations that grew into the questions which then spurred on the literature search, and how the larger project expanded from there.

### *The Power of Design*

The first question developed while working on the final project for a community design studio, one of the first studio courses in the MLA program. The assignment, roughly, was to

redesign a sizeable portion of Gainesville Florida's downtown area. This was the first time I had seriously considered whether a cul-de-sac or a grid system would be more desirable circulation in a given (and relatively unfamiliar) context.

My immediate question was, quite frankly, "Who am I to say?" It was urgently clear that whatever I might draw on the paper plan, if made manifest, would have substantial impacts on the people living in and around the study area. In hindsight, this perhaps seems obvious, and quite the entire point of design—to affect (and ideally, improve) experience. I felt an awareness develop in that moment that came with a sense of gravity. Although I had driven through different circulation patterns myself, I was arrested by a visceral sense of something missing from my pool of resources to inform a decision I would be willing to stand behind. In hindsight, I recognize this feeling as the weight of responsibility, and an unwillingness to take a stance for other people without feeling that I understood their perspective and needs. At this point, I had not yet learned about participatory design methods, and proceeded to make the most minimal alterations to the existing plan as possible, ones that could be easily "undone." As someone who does not fall sick often, it seems no coincidence that I became miserably ill while preparing for the final presentation.

In presenting the final projects, my "cautious" approach was followed by a fellow student with the polar opposite approach. His plan transformed the entire area, leaving very little of any existing structure visible or in use, juxtaposing two opposite approaches to the site. The jury discussion that ensued considered the "power of design(ers)," and therefore also, the responsibility of design(ers) to affect how human settlement nestles into or disrupts its context

socially, economically, and ecologically. Thus the first preliminary question emerged: what is the power and responsibility of a designer?

### *“People Problems”*

The second founding question was more of an observation that came in a planting design studio, out on a field trip to a site the class would be working with. It was a park in a low income county where the manager of the park wore many other hats, playing all the roles she could to make the most of a limited budget. She shared that the forested area of the park had a prescribed burn plan that was rigorously designed by an “expert” that required the Parks Department to team up with the Forestry Department. Implementation was prevented, however, because of the poor working relationship between the two agencies—an interpersonal conflict. Meanwhile brush and understory vegetation didn’t wait for resolution, but continued to amass at the foot of the forest, creating conditions at a higher risk for hotter, damaging fires rather than regenerative, germinating ones.

My realization then was that, in those circumstances, the “problem” was not to do with design or technical approach, but with people. This was the pivotal moment that brought me to consider that at least some of the solutions design seeks to provide are not technical ones, but are, rather, social, cultural, interpersonal, and behavioral. And I began to wonder, how are these facets of design work being addressed, and what is missing (i.e. what is happening here?)?

# Chapter 4: Phase II - Literature Review

The questions above about power and responsibility of design and the human dimensions of it directed the literature search towards public participation both in participatory design methods and participatory processes in fields outside of design that have grappled with issues relevant to the topic of sharing power through dialogue including planning, architecture, international development, community development, and public and community art. The following literature review works to demonstrate the evolving context of participatory practices and to support the claim that a more explicit understanding of communicative aspects of practice are needed to navigate the political nature of design and create the dialogues necessary to do so.

## **Postmodernism, Participation, and Power: Arnstein's Ladder**

Arnstein's seminal article on participation, published in 1969, was foundational in the discourse on participation and power sharing, and underpins much of where it has gone since then. It stands as a starting point in this project that bridges the questions of power and responsibility and the notion of "people problems" with participation. Her argument that participation *is* power directed and supported the exploration of participation to investigate how power is shared and what that process looks like.

### *Postmodernism*

Arnstein's article came at a time when universalized modernist thinking was under critique for its oppressive nature, and the desire for understanding and acknowledging diversity in perspectives that became postmodernism was taking hold.

Thomas Finkelpearl, in *Dialogues in Public Art*, offers a few illustrative highlights of the time. In 1961 Jane Jacobs condemned modernist architecture in her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, as a creator of division and isolation, as she “extolled the value of interconnection....[and] called for a more democratic design process that included the voice of the user (2000, p. 16).” Six years later, Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradictions in Architecture*, Finkelpearl posits, marked the beginning of postmodernism. Nationally, 21 race riots in the same year, amongst an array of social and political unrest worldwide, added to the perceived need for a perspective shift.

At this time, architecture and planning schools were “broadening their focus to become more interdisciplinary and responsive to community needs,” (p. 20). This shift towards inclusion of and grappling with a diverse set of voices rather than homogenizing them is essentially what participatory practices were born out of. Arnstein’s model came on the scene in the midst of this shift away from absolutist ideas about truth prevalent in modernist thinking, and stands as an indicator of the emergent postmodern epistemology

### *Participation is Power*

Simply put, Arnstein defines citizen participation as citizen power. She elaborates that participation is “the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future,” (1969, p. 216). Her now well-known model for typologies of citizen participation in the form of a ladder can be seen below in Figure 3. The bottom rungs represent “non-participation,” or methods that allow citizen access to the least amount of power in decision making, and the top rung is citizen control of a decision. It serves to make her central point in warning against

empty shows of participatory engagement that fail to give meaningful weight to those with less power. The major difference in literature on participation across disciplines is whether or not they address the issue of power and this manipulative or “dark side” of it.

Taking a relational view of the ladder, or a view that primarily considers the implications for how groups and individuals relate to one another as well as the problem or decision at hand, the rungs become a list of how power “have’s” may choose to interact with power “have-nots” from giving them full power to manipulating them to preserve their position (or at least their perception) of having power or control.

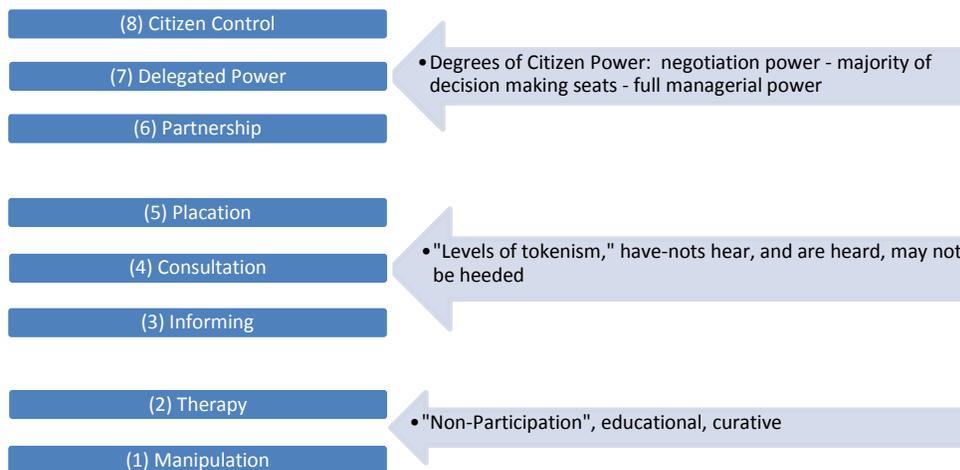


Figure 3: Adapted from (Arnstein, 1969)

### *Simple Model, Complex Reality*

This model is often held up as one that pioneered the dialogue on power dynamics as they relate to participatory processes, and is commonly noted in the context of calling for something more in the way of understanding and evaluating of these processes. Arnstein was explicit that the model was designed to be a *provocative simplification* to “juxtapose the powerful with the powerless in order to highlight the fundamental differences,” (1969, p. 217) at a time when the issue of inauthentic or manipulative use of participation was not yet widely

recognized. Raising awareness was a fundamental goal of what she wrote, rather than methodological categorization of participation. She did define each rung, but this is done so generally to contrast the difference between a situation of power sharing versus other actions that, while they may be helpful as parts of a larger effort in which the power of decision making is genuinely shared, standing alone they amount to distractions and mere feigning of what Arnstein is willing to call genuine participation. She indicates that the line between genuine and manipulative participation is far more blurry than rungs on the ladder, and ultimately uses the metaphor to raise awareness in practitioners doing participatory work.

There is simplification between the “haves” and “have-nots,” and she warns against seeing power difference as a strict binary between the “haves” and the “have-nots”, where actually:

[e]ach encompasses a host of divergent points of view, significant cleavages, competing vested interests, and splintered subgroups. The simplification is justified in that in most cases, the have-nots really do perceive the powerful as a monolithic ‘system,’ and the power-holders view the have-nots as a sea of ‘those people’ with little comprehension of the differences among them (Arnstein, p. 217).

It is interesting to this conversation that she points out the perception between groups with varying degrees of power, each with its own set of internal diversity, and their failure to see and understand the “other” except in a homogenous way. More than forty years after her publication, this it is still a relevant reminder about checking assumptions about groups of people at any level, taking care to acknowledge the multiplicity that exists within any group.

Also of note is her observation that “roadblocks to achieving genuine levels of participation,” occur on both sides of the figurative fence:

On the power-holders’ side, they include racism, paternalism, resistance to power redistribution. On the have-nots’ side, they include inadequacies of poor community’s

political socioeconomic infrastructure and knowledge base, and difficulties of organizing a representative and accountable citizens' group in the face of futility, alienation, and distrust, (Arnstein, p.217).

This alludes to the conflict that arises when power is redistributed; people with power tend to want to hold on to it, and those without power often aren't aware of the paths to its effective acquisition. Effectively, there are potential "blind spots" that each individual or group involved can be subject to. This concept of challenges on both sides of the "fence" so to speak is an important building block in the foundation of the discussion here as calls for dialogue begin to ring out. Although this concept is simple, maybe even obvious, it seems to be a persisting challenge to address and handle the challenges on "both sides." Arnstein's alert to manipulative uses of participation versus empowerment of marginalized groups to be involved in planning (as well as in design and development) was part of starting a dialogue that is still contested.

## Practice is Political

### *Change Hurts*

White, in her article, "Depoliticizing Development: The Uses and Abuses of Participation," recognizes the political nature of development and participation, and emphasizes the reality of shifting power relationships. She contends that if participatory efforts succeed at redistributing power, that some challenge in that process should be expected. She says,

If participation means that the voiceless gain a voice, we should expect this to bring some conflict. It will challenge power relations, both within any individual project and in wider society. The absence of conflict in many supposedly 'participatory' programmes (ibid.) is something that should raise our suspicions. Change hurts. Beyond this, the bland front presented by many discussions of participation in development should itself suggest questions. What interests does this 'non-politics' serve, and what interests may it be suppressing? (White, 1996, p. 15)

Her point again points to the manipulative cooption of participation by the powerful who seek to create a pretense of dialogue without actually sharing their power. In the context of this project, this suggests the importance of both an ethical framework and an effective means to navigate and support these situations where professionals may be in a position to support the “voiceless” in “gaining a voice.” Being prepared to deal with changes of this nature and the conflicts that can arise in the process arguably becomes a priority for professionals when practice is viewed from a political lens.

### *Seeing Beyond the Scope of Work*

Brown and Jennings, in their provoking article in *Landscape Journal*, “Social Consciousness in Landscape Architecture Education: Toward a Conceptual Framework,” make a critical point concerning the wide impact design and planning decisions often have. They point to the political nature, not just of participation, but of practice as a whole. The excerpt is long, but stands to make an important point:

The consequences of planning and design efforts affect landscapes and stakeholders at a variety of scales well beyond the contractual scope of work, whether the client or practitioner operates in the public or private sector. This public impact of landscape architecture means that the profession is involved with decision-making concerning the use, allocation, and preservation of resources, albeit in perhaps indirect ways. As a result, the practice of landscape architecture engages questions of power and hence becomes political by influencing any or all of the formal and informal social structures that are part of the design context (economic, legal, communicative, organizational, behavioral, etc.). This realization pushes the practice of landscape architecture into the political realm, and forces it to confront the realities of political power as well as the institutional and social structures that embody this power. (Brown, 2003, p. 99)

With their acknowledgment of the wide reaching impact that decisions in practice can make regardless of the “scope of work” or whether it is of the “public or private sector,” they make the case that with such a power to affect people and landscapes comes an ethical responsibility

to those affected. They make no direct mention of participatory design itself, only that the effects of practice reach farther than what is most commonly considered in practice. It is left up to the reader and the cohort of practitioners to decide if a participatory approach is the most appropriate, socially just response within a practice that is itself laden with power dynamics. Of note here is their inclusion of “the communicative” as part of the context in which the political, institutional, and social web of relationships in which design practice exists whether it is “participatory” or not. This point about the communicative aspects of practice will be returned to with Sommerville’s research and others who underscore and call for dialogue as an important element of contending with the power and responsibility of design and development.

Brown and Jennings are critical of a tendency away from this realization in practice as well as in design education:

In this paper, we argue that the collective consciousness of landscape architecture has failed to explicitly recognize the political nature of its practice. This has manifested an apolitical service ideal espoused by the profession in the United States and has been translated into what are assumed to be apolitical curriculums among professional programs. (Brown, p. 99)

This point seems profoundly important as the interconnectedness of global and local issues (social, environmental, and economic) continues to reveal itself. Their call is to confront this complexity directly rather than hide behind a “service ideal” or building practice around external factors such as ideas about what the market “wants” rather than on a basis of ethics and social justice as Brown and Jennings suggest. Of course this isn’t to say an understanding of economic factors is unimportant in practice, but it isn’t what we allow to drive the decision making that, as is brought to attention here, has broad impacts. It is not enough, Brown and

Jennings seem to say, to carry on practice as though cries about time, funding, and the honest challenges of the political aspects of practice themselves excuse practicing under the blindness of an “apolitical service ideal” that pretends not to know, or chooses not to accept responsibility for the full range of consequences that changing landscapes can have.

With their direct, but caring criticism, they offer some direction: “As an alternative, we advocate developing an explicit collective consciousness within the profession, and offer the principle of social justice as a foundation for such a consciousness,” (Brown, p. 99). Such a foundation for a shared sensibility in practice, they offer, is a step toward a practice that is not only aware of its broad impacts, but seeks to find solutions that do not support continued further entrenchment of institutionalized inequalities in society. Rather, it suggests a cohort of practitioners equipped to deal with the conflict that may, as White pointed out, arise when norms that are not serving our values are challenged.

Juarez asks an important question about the responsibility of landscape architects in community as the professional role and responsibility comes under examination:

As Chamber's framework notes, outcomes fall within a continuum between an emphasis on plans and publications and sustainable local action. This raises an important question for landscape architects regarding where our role in community planning and design ends. Traditionally, plans and publications have been the end result of our work. If our work moves beyond this point into facilitating sustained local action, how is that effectively accomplished? (Juarez, 2008)

This question is at the heart of this project in examining authentic dialogue and what it takes to create that. Understanding, as Innes (1999) points out, that boundaries are blurred in processes where authentic dialogue does take place, how do we navigate our role as people and place-makers in light of our traditional role as professionals and experts?

## Practice is Communicative

Sommerville's (2001) thorough study on the communicative nature of landscape architecture practice does a great deal to create grounds for the work of this project. She builds an extensive argument illustrating the importance of relationships, dialogue, interpersonal interaction, social learning, and improvisation skills necessary to practice, citing a range of authors who support her point that design is socially situated, and largely communicative. She contends that design is, rather than a linear, rational process of problem solving, an open ended, intuitive process in which stories, experiences, values, and other types of considerations that fall outside of the quantitative or scientific scope are not only valid, but necessary parts of what really happens in design practice. While acknowledging the important role of technical theories and practices, and really a wide range of theories important to the broad scope of what practitioners do in practice, her study seeks to create a balance in what she gathers is an under-examined aspect of the design process that she calls "communicative practice," referring to these more tacit, implicit, intuitive, values based, personal sides of it (p. 35).

She quotes Sokolowski (1991) who asserts relationships as being "a defining feature of professional practice on par with technical competency," (as cited in Sommerville, 2001 p. 4). Communication skills are, however, "tacit" in nature, and "simply overlooked in favor of technical theories," (Simon 198 as cited in Sommerville, 2001, p. 4). Sommerville also cites Forester (1999) who "contends [that] design practitioners might recognize the art and science of good communication. They might also realize that communicative work is itself a kind of action." She continues to cite Forester (1999) in saying that designers can also help to design

argumentative spaces, [or] social situations that encourage dialogue, promote collaboration, and result in shared understanding about common issues (as cited in Sommerville, p. 27). Similar to these argumentative spaces are what Schneekloth and Shibley discuss as “dialogic space,” which, they assert, is the most important aspect of design practice (1995) as cited in (Sommerville, p. 28).

Sommerville’s study observed and documented how communicative practice is currently being achieved in order to build a theoretical framework that can describe “what is happening.” She used a participatory project to do her study, arguing that participatory settings are ones in which the communicative side of practice are clearly important, and readily observed as practitioners engage with stakeholders. This project builds off of her acknowledgment of the communicative side of practice, as well as her emphasis of its importance.

### *“Wicked Problems”*

Sommerville (2001) and Sancar (1993) refer to the problems of planning design problems as “wicked,” meaning that there are often not clear definitions of the problem to begin with. Leaving out parties who may have a stake in the process or leaving assumptions about what kind of problem exists to solve unexamined can have a considerable impact on what the solution appears to be, and thus the resulting potentially wide impact that Brown and Jennings drew attention to. The process of defining the problem is one place where the communicative aspect of practice’s relationship with the sharing or distributing of power can easily be understood.

## The Power to Empower

Juarez's (2008) study is valuable because it is written from a landscape architect's point of view, and is relatively recent compared to Arnstein's work, showing the persisting challenges faced in grappling with power dynamics in communicative, participatory endeavors. He addresses participation, empowerment of marginalized groups, and the dialogues about participation that happen in multiple disciplines, but as he notes, rarely cross pollinate with one another. Juarez synthesizes several prominent authors on participation and emphasizes

[the] importance of understanding power relations between local people and the outside professional, between local people and institutions that work in and around the community and within the local community itself. Most concur that this is essential in any participatory process, but particularly for those that focus on empowering locals to challenge existing structures and transform conditions (Chambers 1997; White 1996; Jones 1998; Brown and Jennings 2003; Crewe and Forsyth 2003 as cited in Juarez, 2008, pp. 192-3).

This demonstrates the widening, often facilitative role that professionals may feel called to play when social transformation seems an appropriate response to an issue. His framing of the situation, however, demonstrates the re-making of participation as suggested by Eversole in the field of community development.

# Chapter 5: Phase III - Experiencing Dialogue

## Participatory Programs

I learned about participation by participating in three experience based programs that promised some opportunity to experience “authentic dialogue,” or the human dimensions of problems in unique, “real life” ways.

**-Regenerative Leadership Institute (RLI)**

-Permaculture Design Course with a “social permaculture” focus

**-Natural Resources Leadership Institute (NRLI)**

-Place-Based course examining human dimensions of natural resource decision making designed to teach facilitative skills and participatory values to build a network of professionals who affect natural resources with skills training in consensus and understanding in social dynamics

**-Satvatove Institute School of Transformative Communication (SISTC)**

-Courses developed for helping professionals (and open to anyone) teaching a set of principles and practices to use communication as a tool for supporting growth and awareness in self and others

Each of the three programs offered insights into the tacit nature of dialogue individually, and they also worked in relationship to one another to deepen my understanding and experience of how to create responsible, authentic dialogue. Here I will explain a bit about the process of experiencing these programs, and how they fit in to this project individually and collectively, starting with the preliminary experiences with RLI and the Satvatove Foundational that, as mentioned previously, created some inspiration and direction for the project.

## Lessons in Regenerative Leadership

The Regenerative Leadership Institute was the first of the three programs that I participated in. I had not heard much of permaculture before, but it seemed to be in line with landscape architecture, building community, and living “sustainably.” Fortunately, the course’s

direction was far beyond a how-to guide for homesteading. This particular permaculture course offered an expansive perspective on how to use systems thinking to apply the permaculture principles to any aspect of life with the reasoning that all aspects of life are, at the bottom, contained within “nature.” Quite a lot of material was covered in 10 days; more than what is entirely applicable here. But what stood out the most, and what is most relevant to the present conversation is the course’s perspective on *social permaculture*: the idea that the principles of permaculture can, in some way, be applied in relationships with ourselves and with other people. Not only was this a possible application, we discussed, it seemed like an important and often overlooked piece of the puzzle when thinking about designing “regenerative solutions.”

The word regenerative was an important theme for the course also, as a founding philosophy that the word “sustainable,” is simply not enough. Sustainable represents, in the context of this course, “breaking even” with our natural resources. The regenerative approach, on the other hand, acknowledges the great damage people have caused to natural systems, and still holds the vision and understanding that nature is, on its own, regenerative, or a system that builds upon itself, wasting nothing, ever building toward a state of flourishing. Regenerative solutions, according to RLI, don’t just sustain themselves, they create the conditions to regenerate themselves, to flourish.

In many ways, the course was a miniature landscape architecture curriculum for non-professionals; there was a good deal of overlap with what I had learned so far in the MLA program and what was presented as core content in the course in terms of how to “do” permaculture design. What differentiated permaculture was its clarity and priority on its own

principles and ethics. Landscape architecture being so broad is not held as tightly together in this way. This model of sharing design capacity and knowledge with an ever expanding population of people is important to keep in mind as the discussion will return to this idea.

The modules on applying the principles to social systems were most interesting to me. I could feel a sense of urgency around what was being related. The group of participants as a whole had mixed reactions to this aspect of the course. Some were surprised and even a bit turned off by it, as it was not part of the course on gardening they were expecting. Others took to it well, and still others seemed indifferent. Some of the experiences created in these social modules were very uncomfortable. For the sake of confidentiality of the course's processes, I won't explicitly describe *what* was done. It is enough to say that as a participant I was given the opportunity to connect with other people in far deeper ways than I had previously experienced. What I got to see is how quick and easy it is to disconnect from other people, to not recognize them fully as a human being with thoughts, feelings, challenges, and ambitions. Of course this was not a new concept, and I was not incapable of empathy before taking this course. However, experiencing a group of "strangers" in an *intentionally* connected way in the context of also learning regenerative permaculture design was a sort of re-awakening experience that put me in touch with something I felt I already "knew" somehow. It was a renewed connection both to myself and to others.

### *"The Power of Vulnerability"*

An important piece of the course on the social permaculture front was Brene Brown's research on the Power of Vulnerability, and how keeping emotions out of the picture can seem like a harmless necessity—especially in the professional world. Brown has some wisdom to

offer on this point. She originally began her studies in psychology around human connection, which, she said, led to shame and fear people experienced around not having it. She found that “the only variable that was different” between those who live in high connection with other people, and those who were stuck in the shame and fear was their belief that they were worthy of connection. From that place, those that felt they were worthy of connection were willing to be *vulnerable*, or “give up who they think they should be in order to be who they really are.” Being vulnerable means feeling and being in touch with emotions and thoughts, and choosing when (and when not) to express honestly rather than numbing and internalizing which leads to disconnection not only from pain, but from joy, from ourselves, and from other people. Brown states, “we cannot selectively numb.” When we shut down to some part of our experience for long enough, she discovered, the rest of our ability to feel also becomes numbed. Brown goes on to point out that, currently, we are the “most in debt, obese, addicted, and heavily medicated adult cohort in the history of the united states,” (how is that for perspective?) indicating that emotional escapism is no rare phenomenon in our culture.

In the course discussion of Brown’s work on vulnerability, we discussed what this meant not only for our personal lives, but also what it means for the ways we engage with the world professionally, and our willingness to see the impact our actions and decisions has on each other directly and indirectly. Brown mentions this herself in pointing to what happens when corporations (rather, the people who run them) pretend as though their decisions don’t impact other people—and they do. This is where her work is most relevant to what we do in landscape architecture, and where I feel a connection between that weight of responsibility I felt in the

community design studio and the decisions we make in practice that very much have an impact on other people and the environments they live in and depend on.

But this short piece of the course was only part of the beginning of this exploration. I wanted to understand more what it would look like to bring this type of awareness into practice both personally and professionally. The possible outcomes seemed promising, especially when, as part of the course, architect Mark Lakeman came in and gave a presentation on his approach to design. This moment was so relevant, that I include his approach as a case study of one way the design process can “look” when it becomes truly participatory by Eversole’s definition.

### *City Repair*

I experienced Mark’s presentation on his design approach as sharp, light-hearted, insightful, and genuine. He shared his personal story of becoming disenchanted with the design profession, disconnected from the goals of the work, and how he, if you will, tipped over his own box by leaving the country to live for some time with an indigenous tribe in South America. Time spent living with a group of people who lived in close connection with the land reawakened his passion and his vision of what he wanted to create with his design practice. He came back to the United States and began build what is now known as City Repair, a non-profit community group that works together to create higher quality of life in the neighborhood and in the city.

I offer his work as exemplary of Eversole’s definition of participatory because Mark started in his own backyard...or front yard...literally. He began creating the type of place he wanted to live where he was, and creatively reached out to his neighbors. He built a makeshift community gathering space (the design of which was based off of an embryonic form) out of

recycled materials and built colorful wings onto a truck. Out of both of these structures, he shared cake and tea with neighbors, striking up conversations, connections, and building relationships. A core group developed out of an existing neighborhood watch group, and eventually the whole neighborhood began to transform from the inside out. Mark brought a cardboard model of his neighborhood with him to show where people began to take down their fences and put in shared gardens, paths, seating, and other amenities. He could point to each house and explain the personality of the neighbor that lived there: a longstanding conflict between neighbors that got resolved, and even one neighbor who didn't mind what the others did, but didn't care to be involved. Lakeman shared a living example of a community: a group of people that don't necessarily have any one thing in common, except for whatever it is that makes them a community, be it place, culture, identity, interest, etc. He invited us to participate in his process by passing out construction paper paths, gathering nodes, and other possible site features to play with and imagine how a once divided space could function as a socially connected space.

Painted street intersections are a hallmark of Mark's approach. He discussed the importance of gathering space, and illustrated how treating an intersection as strictly a through way for vehicle circulation divides a neighborhood where he saw the potential to redraw a circle in the intersection, painting a vibrant mural in the center of it, so that traffic slows and neighbors feel inclined to take over the space for community gathering. Eventually the creative energy and connective hub became City Repair.

I offer this example as a case study of one way that Eversole's definition of participation remade not because it is colorful and creative, but because Mark truly became a participant in

other people's process. He offered alternative perspectives on how to create a neighborhood using some of his design "expertise," but not until he met his neighbors where they were at, and let their concerns and ideas blend with his own (he was part of the group, after all) to guide where they went with projects and efforts. This seems to speak volumes to the discussion on "whose knowledge counts," or what kind of knowledge counts in design, which is very much related to power. As Kelly and Van Vlaenderen's study showed in the literature review, this type of rethinking of the role of an expert, what services are offered, and how, can be threatening to professionals with an invested set of assumptions and expectations about what their role is. Lakeman's local effort can be seen as a living example of what Eversole described (noted in the literature review) as the interdependence of community and expert knowledge. He participated fully in his own community in a similar fashion to what Eversole described as a "coal-faced practitioner," who could see and facilitate from both the position of community member and of expert, offering skills and perspectives where helpful, and primarily encouraging others to be as involved as they wanted to be.

It is important to note, however, this is no perfect solution to Eversole's call. An "expert," even in his or her own community still has the potential to take control of a community decision if enough people defer, and if she is not conscious of how her expertise may be more or less helpful or needed in a given situation. This is just one example of what participating in the processes of others could look like.

Finally, his approach to being a participant and the success of his approach in creating a highly connected community underscores the importance of the communicative, and how he creatively wove his own passion and skill for design into a process of bringing people together

to learn about, and in many ways, discover their own community of physical and social space. He was willing to engage genuinely with people in his own neighborhood, creating a web of relationships. One exercise he shared doing with the neighborhood was to take an aerial view of the neighborhood, and write in who lives in what house, what skills or knowledge each person has, and then draw lines between houses where resources could be paired together to create something, or just connect. This helped create a visualization of potential connections that that opened doors to people relating and sharing with one another in ways they had not previously thought to do.

Juarez notes the use of participation is “here to stay” despite the swarm of unresolved questions that surround it still.

When roles are primary in public settings, viewed as a professional, expert, or authority (Sancar—police were present; Lang—professional and personal; Kelly & Van Vlaenderen)—experts don’t want their role to be challenged. When does wearing a suit hinder our ability to connect versus create desired credibility? Awareness at this level of relationship is the foundation of participatory leadership, and does make a difference. It may seem trivial, or obvious, but when intentionally creating “safe” space for genuine connection is the priority, then a) the intention is primary, and also, b) the smallest details can be used to support the cause rather than left out of consideration. Staffing the seminars for Satvatove, a very specific atmosphere is intentionally designed down to the paperclips in order to create the sense of a safe space for the most vulnerable sharing. This isn’t to say that every detail must always be perfect; but rather, there is opportunity to work with as many details as we choose to support of our efforts in creating space that supports people to come out from behind the roles they

play and be who they really are. This is, as Brown's work on vulnerability, and NRLI's groan zone concept will support, the space in which creativity and innovation are more likely to flourish.

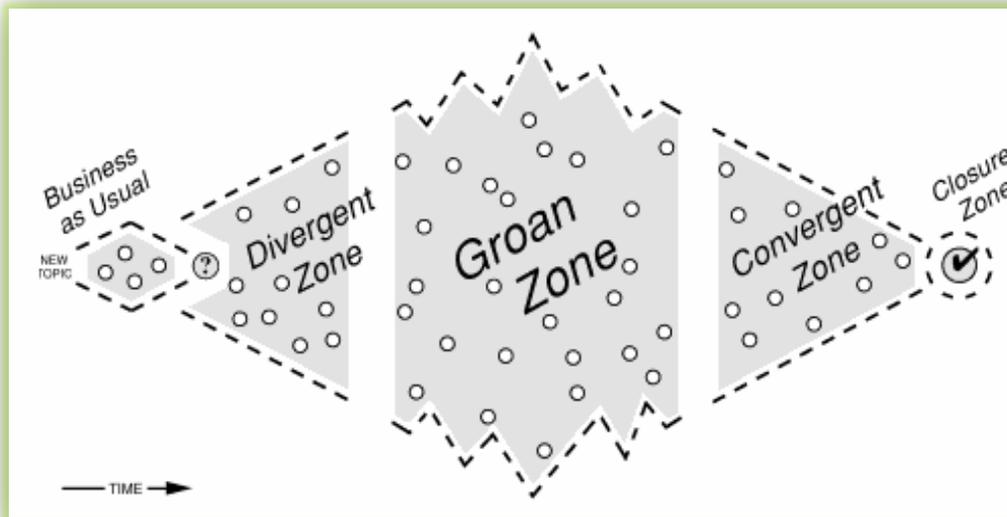
## Natural Resources Leadership Institute

### *Easy on the People*

NRLI's sort of "bottom line" message is to be "easy on the people, and hard on the issues." This simple phrase encapsulates quite a lot. Their approach is to understand the human dimensions and social nature of problems that do affect natural resource conflicts and decision making. Their stance acknowledges the importance of respecting and seeing people for who they are, meeting them where they are at, while standing assertively in principles of environmental protection if that is what our goal is. It is an acknowledgment that all the science, logic, data, and reports may still not be "enough" to affect outcomes. Instead, we must deal with and confront human beings with their emotional, rational, physical, and even spiritual dispositions.

### *The Groan Zone*

Another key concept in NRLI was that of the "Groan Zone," or the model of decision making from Kaner's (2007) *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making*. Rather than a linear process, he shows that decision making is more accurately illustrated by a sort of diamond shape (see figure 4). As we can see, business-as-usual decision making processes don't often create the space to voice divergent points of view, and can often close prematurely.



(Kaner, 2007, p. 19) **Figure 4: The Groan Zone in Decision Making**

The jagged lines around the groan zone represent the discomfort often associated with listening to different perspectives, taking the time to that, and especially, dealing with the emotional ups and downs that accompany it. However, this “zone” is where higher level solutions are often discovered. In this light, it becomes clearly important to learn to effectively navigate emotions as they are inevitably part of the whole picture when dealing with people who see situations differently.

### *Emotional Intelligence*

For this reason, NRLI discusses the neuro-science behind emotions to help further understand what’s going on with these emotional situations, and why logic or cognitive intelligence isn’t always sufficient for handling decision making, but in fact, emotional intelligence is critical as well. Daniel Goleman’s (1997) book, *Emotional Intelligence* was a resource in the course to develop this understanding. In it, he explains LeDoux’s relatively

recent neuro-science understanding of the brain's dynamic functioning in regards to emotional and rational capacity.

LeDoux discovered the central role the amygdala plays, which is the center of passion and emotion, tears, anger, fear, love, etc. This emotional center, he found, can “take control over what we do even as the thinking brain, the neo-cortex, is still coming to a decision,” (p. 15). Sensory signals must travel across only a single synapse to the amygdala which can trip powerful emotions and send us into fight or flight response physically. To get to the rational, neo-cortex part of the brain receives a second signal in which information travels through “several levels of brain circuits before it fully perceives and finally initiates its more finely tailored response,” (p. 17). This is not how all information is handled, but acts as a sort of direct back alley route for highly charged information. This realization that the rational brain and the emotional brain can act quite separately from one another explains why we sometimes have feelings and reactions to things that are outside of our rational ability to explain.

While decision making in landscape architecture or in natural resource decision making may not always feel life threatening, there is an infinite number of variable that could cause emotional responses to decision making that *does* impact their livelihood, their resources, or any other subterranean reason that a person may be triggered into an emotional state. The important point is that emotions happen, and when they do, rationalizing doesn't always (or even usually) work perhaps “because” that part of the psyche is overridden by the energy of the emotion.

## Empathy: A Key

With this in mind, the principle of being easy on the people and hard on the issue takes on deeper meaning. Being able to understand people where they are, emotions and all, and be hold space for difference is integral to the participatory values put forth in NRLI, as laid out in

Participatory Groups	Conventional Groups
Everyone participates, not just the vocal few.	The fastest thinkers and most articulate speakers get more air time.
People give each other room to think and get their thoughts all the way out.	People interrupt each other on a regular basis.
Opposing viewpoints are allowed to co-exist within the group.	Differences of opinion are viewed as conflicts that must be either stifled or solved.
People draw each other out with supportive questions, e.g., <i>'Is this what you mean ... ?'</i>	Questions are often viewed as challenges, as if the person being questioned has done something wrong or has faulty thinking.
Each person makes the effort to pay attention to the person speaking.	Unless the speaker captivates their attention, people space out, doodle and check the clock.
People are able to listen to each other's ideas because they know that their own ideas will also be heard.	People have difficulty listening to each other's ideas because they're busy rehearsing what they want to say.
Each member speaks up on matters of controversy. Everyone knows where everyone stands.	Some members remain quiet on controversial matters. No one really knows where everyone stands.
Members can accurately represent each other's viewpoints, even when they don't agree with them.	Members rarely give accurate representations of the opinions and reasoning of those with whom they don't see eye-to-eye.
People refrain from talking behind each other's backs. Issues are discussed within the group.	Because they don't feel permission/safe to be direct during the meeting, people talk behind each other's backs outside of the meeting.
Even in the face of opposition from the person-in-charge or majority of the group, people are encouraged to stand up for their beliefs.	People with discordant, minority perspectives are commonly discouraged from speaking out.
A problem is not considered solved until everyone who will be affected by the solution understands the reasoning.	A problem is considered solved as soon as the fastest thinkers have reached an answer. Everyone else is expected to 'get on board' regardless of whether s/he understands the logic of the decision.
When people make an agreement, it is assumed that the decision still reflects a wide range of perspectives.	When people make an agreement, it is assumed that they are all thinking the exact same thing.

Adapted from *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making* by Sam Kaner, et al.

(Kaner, 2007, p. xviii) **Table 4: Participatory Values**

Kaner's Guide (See Table 4). Many of the values are based around the intention of creating mutual understanding in circumstances where conflict or divergence could occur. Being able to represent others' viewpoints is related to empathy, listening, and openness. A commitment to not speaking behind one another's backs is part of creating trust in the shared space that what needs to be said can be said in front of everyone, there is space for all points of view. The principles of ground-rules and empathic listening are principles that were practiced rigorously in Satvato's Transformative Communication workshops where learning how to deal with emotional charge is a primary focus as an important element in self-realization.

## **Satvato: Framework of Transformative Communication**

### **What is Transformative Communication?**

Transformative Communication is a set of principles and practices for "conscious living" developed by Dr. David Wolf, Ph.D. as part of a training program for those in the helping professions where both communication and ethical stance are vital. It is a framework that uses communication as a tool to build self-awareness, effective communication, and community. It is based on the following values:

Service, Integrity, Excellence, Dignity and inherent worth of every person,  
Accountability, Commitment, Human relationships, Personal Growth, Spiritual essence<sup>4</sup>  
of all living beings, Self-determination.

In experiencing training with this program, the framework of transformative communication (TC) became a lens through which to understand the other experiences as well as the literature on participation.

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<sup>4</sup> What is meant by "spiritual essence," is that constant identity in you from the time you were 5 years old, until the time you are 45 years old, even though biologically, all of the cells in your body have been replaced by then.

-It offers a structured approach to principled communication and action with room for personal values and difference among practitioners.

-Its foundational skills and principles of communication shed light on “what’s going on” with communication and the people who attempt it, and

-if applied in practice, the framework could be cornerstone in “remaking participation” as Eversole (2012) called for so that we as practitioners are learning to “participate in the processes of others.”

# Chapter 6: Phase IV - Findings

## Reflecting the Process

I want to convey that this wasn't just an exercise that I went through to get through the thesis and get a degree. These were the real questions of my life and of my experience, and I engaged with them as such—in ways that were both private and very rigorous.

I was simultaneously interested in the art and the phenomenology of how “reality” comes to be what it is, and how to effectively intervene. Once I dove into the question of human power and potential it made me question at a basic level why things are the way they are, and what are the limits of what is possible. This is why I love art and philosophy. They are arenas in which the stretching of human potency and potentiality emerge and show themselves. In these realms we are challenged to express and to explain. My question was about the metaphysics of suburban sprawl.

I lived “the transect” before I ever knew that word or understood the concept cohesively. From downtown Louisville to suburban Louisville to rural and yet more rural parts of Kentucky, I had unexpressed questions about how and why we choose to engage with and shape the land the way we do. It has become clear that the answers are highly related to how people relate to each other, and perhaps even more so, how they relate to themselves. Here's the place where I get scared to sound like Pollyanna, but it reveals itself to be true. “Why are there strip malls everywhere?” “Why are dollar stores in the middle of nowhere?” “Why is there such pervasive dependence on cars?” “Why create such social isolation?” There are superficial answers to these questions, and in learning to take a deeper look, there are more subtle layers to explore. If we are to take on a perspective of radical responsibility for the

places in which we dwell, we might, within the framework of transformative communication, ask ourselves what is that about? What do these types of places express? How do I want to respond to these expressions?

In the process of transformative communication, all experiences are valid—all are doors to self-realization, to seeing one's own process, the foundation from which growth can occur. This encompasses physical reality, yes, and also cognitive dimensions, emotional experience, and spiritual discovery. Dr. Wolfe has observed that at times, in the name of science we are very unscientific indeed, referring to the point that by choosing (consciously or not) to exclude the personal, spiritual, emotional, less tangible variables that are at play in a system we really aren't objectively seeing the whole picture.

Experiencing through this lens, my vision of what place-making can be has been transformed. I came into this project out of a personal journey, emerged from the red box of fear into the process—a multi-year fight, a struggle that began as a sort of internalized case of domestic violence against myself—hiding bruises, trying to act normal when my own internal environment has been quite hostile, deeply pushed into hiding, suffocating my own spirit, my own creativity, my own voice. The moments when the fight would no longer be contained, when the neighbors were woken, when my reality was seen, heard, understood and misunderstood, these were the moments of transformation. This is a metaphor, and yet the inner workings of the mind and heart can be every bit as “real” as physical “reality.” There was pain in seeing what I was allowing myself to live in, and joy in the freedom from staying in those ways.

The opportunity to see myself, my role in my life, my community, and my places in the process of self-realization has changed my concept of what it means to be a person, and therefore what it means to make life, to sculpt reality, to make places. What is my responsibility in creating sterile places or thriving vibrant ones? How is the quality of life experience in a place related to its physicality? How much is the physicality of a place an indicator of the consciousness with which it was created? What were the internal, more subtle processes, or the roots of the results we see around us?

I gave my life to the questions before they were fully articulated—meaning the inquiry permeated my whole experience even before I was clear on what I was asking. In this way the process was not contrived. In RLI my understanding of the inter- and intra- personal roots of our challenges as a society and as a species was expanded beyond my previous understanding. From there my desire to understand social dimensions led me to NRLI and Transformative Communication.

It felt to me that I was being confronted by the physicality of landscapes, and missing the “subterranean” (pun intended) or deeper layers of the equation, of the dynamic system of systems of which our human experience is a vital part. Because the questions were so personal, the lack of depth that I experienced in coincidence with an innate craving for substance and depth created profound dissonance in me. I experienced great discomfort in the uncertainty, in hindsight, due largely to my own lack of awareness and perspective on my own process of seeking. Lacking the sort of “meta-awareness” of this internal dissonance, I found myself in a sort of existential crisis, searching for meaning, questioning the very concept of it. In this place I discovered Satvatove.

Here I am afraid to be interpreted in the light of weakness that I couldn't deal with the real questions, and reached out to something illusory to fill the void of uncertainty. That is precisely what did not occur. Instead I found a mirror in which to see myself, my questions, my fears, and finally my aspirations, my conviction, my own sense of my experience and what to make of it. I was given space to discover my own responsibility, my own power, and my role in "place-making," which I find is really just another word for living. Experiencing the space of acceptance, of safety to be deeply authentic myself opened up new doors to being. It was like being able to breathe after wearing a girdle my whole life, able to see after wearing greasy goggles, able to move after being bound. My experience lit up my consciousness with the thought, "This is what we are capable of as human beings," and I confronted human potential in a most authentic way since building the red box years before, since seeing what Mark Lakeman was creating in his neighborhood, since feeling something vital missing from my experience of the design process.

I got to feel my own feelings, and see my own limitations, and learn how to support others in doing the same. I have found that discovering my own resistance to taking responsibility and accepting my own power has become an ocean from which to draw compassion for other people wherever they are in their process—whatever keeps them resisting their own power and responsibility. The intra-personal relationship I have developed with myself allows me to reach outside of my world into the world or process of another and meet them where they are. This is what I believe Eversole is asking of us in "remaking participation," in being able to participate in others' processes. What she doesn't say, but what I find is true, is that I am infinitely more effective at participating in others' processes when I am

committed to fully participating in my own life process. When I feel my own questions, struggles, challenges, joys, and wonderment fully, accept my experiences openly, I have a foundation from which to relate genuinely with people wherever they are. This relating is the foundation of creating a design practice that is person-centered, that coaches people and places to higher levels of excellence by their own standards.

## Design as Coaching

What I have learned is that in order to support change in something living, like myself, another person, or a place, it is most helpful to first offer **full acceptance** to it as it is, to be able to see the perfection that already exists. If design were approached as “coaching” a place and the people who create it we wouldn’t go in looking for problems to solve. Perhaps this is counter-intuitive when so much of our traditional design process is about defining problems, or framing problems. From the business side of practice this is how we market ourselves, as problem solvers. In giving myself to the process of transformative communication and transformative coaching, I learned to ask different questions. There is a place for defining and articulating problems. At the same time, it can be useful to consider the consciousness that is cultivated by assuming there are problems and we the experts will solve them. How might this attitude drain stakeholders of their opportunity to experience their power and responsibility in a given context? What does it say about how we relate to current landscapes, seeing them as problematic or broken?

The stance of Transformative Communication is that each person is to be trusted by the “coach” as self-determined and capable of living their life at high levels of effectiveness. This principle of “**belief in the client**,” or “unconditional positive regard” as Carl Rogers phrased it,

also applies to groups that go through seminars together, and has the potential to be applied to places as well, understanding places as groups of relationships. As designer-coaches, we can learn to see the perfection in how places express as they are, and embark upon the design process, with people, to discover how and what their place expresses in order to serve them in also discovering what qualities are there that may be covered over for whatever reason that they would like to cultivate more fully in order to bring about balance or more satisfying circumstances.

There is plenty of room for constructive criticism and feedback for both people and places. And, there is also room to acknowledge what is best about a person or a place. In coaching, it often happens that calling attention to the vibrant, successful qualities that are in alignment with a person or community's values—creating self-awareness and perspective around what *is* working, brings more similar success and strengthens the value of those successful qualities. In this way what may have been considered problematic or dramatic falls away in the wake of connecting with what is strong, vital, and important to individuals in a group or community.

The difference between framing a problem that we are going to fix versus discovering what qualities of place we want to nurture and cultivate is a subtle but powerful nuance. This cultivation approach is one of trust that a person, group, or place is already whole, complete, and capable of being vibrant and fulfilled. These are not things that need to be sought out or “brought in” by doing things differently or having different external circumstances. This is the TC principle of “**Be, Do, Have**” or “**subtle to gross**” stating that things move from subtle, invisible, or intangible states to gross, or external states. Ideas originate internally in the mind

for example, and move to paper, to model, to implementation for example. Thoughts, similarly, breed emotions, attitudes, behavior, and finally result in the external circumstances in which we find ourselves—our places included. What kind of thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors yield strip malls, sprawl, and monotonous places? Which promote connectivity, diversity, and beauty? In asking these questions, we can see how being in this spirit of discovery and in the practice of trust in the wholeness of people and their places can subtly, but potently cultivate trust and an uncovering of that which is most desirable rather than a fixation on that which is problematic.

This is not sugar-coating reality; there is a very important difference here. Approaching myself, supporting others, and places with permission to transform them is about cultivating the qualities which we trust are already there, latent potentiality. The understanding is that these qualities or potentialities are there, I don't need to "do" anything or "acquire" anything for this to be true. At the same time, we're looking at ways to raise awareness around those qualities we wish to cultivate more deeply, which are out of balance, so that perhaps thoughts and behaviors that work against the cultivation of those desirable qualities become evident and reveal the need to be somehow addressed. In this way, as Dr. Wolf says, it is "more than positive thinking." Another important distinction to make is that it is also not ignoring or denying challenges or problems that do exist. It is learning to be in the tension between the perfection of what is and the cultivation of that which is more satisfying, perhaps at a deeper level.

Consider Mark Lakeman's practice transforming suburban neighborhoods into people-centered places rich in meaning. The name '*City Repair*' does imply that something is broken,

and there is room for that, acknowledging what doesn't work. At the same time, in his practice, what gets "repaired," or cultivated, is first a sense of belonging, ownership, and connection to people and place, followed by more visible actions and changes to the physical place in the form of intersection paintings, community book trading posts, and expressive memorials to honor the very real and specific needs and interests of the people whose lives will sustain or lay to waste the initiatives for change "brought in" by "outsiders."

And, it isn't that he didn't create "external" structures that may represent "having" in the "be-do-have" continuum in the early stages of cultivating the social connectedness that would found the momentum of the community's transformation. His work illustrates how the "be-do-have" is about placing primacy on the quality of being (on being open and accepting, for example), and recognizing that being, doing, and having are all constantly occurring simultaneously. To clarify, we can examine that Mark was choosing to be a creative and connective designer. He connected with the qualities of his being that were important to him to bring out in his work. From that place, his actions flowed. The circumstances that resulted—community gathering spaces with people who came to know each other better and collaborate in their neighborhood space—was the "having" piece, or the results, the feedback he was getting about the quality of his being.

## **Cultivating the Process: Lessons for Application**

The following is a compilation of considerations built from lessons learned in the process about cultivating the process of dialogue.

### **1) Divergent Perspectives: Hidden gems**

**Problem:** Divergent perspectives can easily be ignored or left under the table if business as usual behavior dominates a meeting or discussion and the goal is expedience.

- “Business as usual” cultivates a culture of mistrust. The rigorous practice of holding space for the important divergence in perspectives is not common practice, but it is a skill that can be developed.
- Taking in divergent perspectives can be uncomfortable for people for various reasons—fear of judgment, desire to move on quickly, unwillingness to hear or voice “outlandish” ideas, etc.

**Consideration:** However, the diversity of perspectives and true interests of stakeholders are the substance of creative, win/win solutions that are likely to last.

- When people are given the space and the tools to express themselves, emotional tension has the opportunity to dissolve, creativity can thrive, and often what seemed like complicated problems transform in to opportunities, choices, and matters of rational discussion.
- There are inner/subtle and outer/more mechanical aspects to creating space to get down to the “authentic” level of dialogue.

**Approach: Creating a safe space or “container” for dialogue**

- Internal/subtle components of holding space include
  - Ground-rules and Accountability
    - ✓ For example, commitment to being engaged, on time, etc.
  - Acceptance of people where and as they are

- “Warmth, Genuineness, and Empathy”
  - ✓ Taking responsibility that nonverbal communication is open, receptive, and caring when building trust
  - ✓ Accessing genuine care for people
  - ✓ Stepping outside of my “world” and practicing taking on different perspectives
- Kaner’s participatory values
- Choosing ourselves to trust the process of TC, ourselves, and those with whom we are in dialogue is essential to establishing space in which others can trust.
- Outer components include
  - Awareness of confidentiality factors of a room
  - Arrangement of chairs that implies equality or hierarchy
  - Ideally, water, bathroom, and even some food outside of the discussion area are supportive to a feeling of safety.
  - Breaks are essential to focus and flow
- **Reflective listening** is one of the most basic and most transformative tools to slow down emotionally charged communication and create understanding instead of “competing monologues.”
  - This practice is transformative in creating understanding and diffusing emotional charge

- When people feel they are understood and heard, they are able to hold more space in themselves to hear and understand others.
- It may seem slow or counter-intuitive, slow, and even awkward at first, but the understanding created can often be the key to opening doors to authenticity.

## 2) Listening for Contextual Knowledge (Finding the value in divergent Perspectives)

**Problem:** Often, embedded in their own assumptions, professionals or “experts” can be blinded to the value of contextual, “non-expert” knowledge

- Reports of how and what professionals said and did the “last time” participation was “done,” for example, can be taken as attitude, opinion, and not valuable.

**Consideration:** The experience of people in the social context with previous “experts” and whatever shading or judgments may or may not exist in relationship to previous experience is highly valuable information for anyone genuinely interested in working with individuals or groups who “suffer from participation fatigue.”

### **Approach: Being Participatory**

- Rather than administering a participatory process as though providing a service, following from the principle of “Be, do, have” the suggested approach here is to be participatory ourselves. Being actively engaged in our own personal process of learning and growth facilitates our ability to meet others where they are.
  - ✓ This means holding a vision of myself with and without my “expert” hat on, and is supported by a genuine desire to serve the highest potential of a place, a vital part of which are the people who co-create it.

- ✓ Standing between expert and non-expert, I am more likely to be able to catch my own judgments and assumptions about what solutions are most appropriate and test them against the real interests of the people affected by those solutions
- ✓ Example: In NRLLI, our group was learning about how communities respond uniquely to climate change from cohesive action in preparation to deciding not to talk about it, to making careful changes and not talking about the possibility of human causes of change. When speaking with a timber farmer, he had little to nothing to say about climate change, exuding discomfort about what his words may reflect on his company regarding an unfamiliar and politicized topic. Considering his point of view and our goal of understanding how local people have experienced change, someone asked him about rainfall patterns. This reframing transformed him into a wealth of valuable information that created understanding for us, and connected with something vitally important for him. In this way, empathy created the pathway from threatening ground in conversation to an authentic dialogue. In seeing from his point of view, we were able to participate in his process on a small scale.
- Suspension of judgment
  - ✓ Engage under the assumption, or at least the possibility that everything shared could potentially be useful or relevant, and it is your job as an

expert in process to facilitate an understanding of how all available information fits into the larger picture.

✓ It isn't that expertise is less valuable in a practice of "being participatory," on the contrary, it becomes more valuable when tempered skillfully with human connection and broadened perspective.

- Acceptance of all experiences, people, self as they are; this is highly related to trusting the process, self, and others.
- Self-awareness, examination
  - ✓ Practice of challenging assumptions
  - ✓ Noticing judgments
  - ✓ Being familiar with my values and boundaries
    - This makes entering someone else's frame of reference much simpler, as though I still may be changed by considering someone else's point of view, I have a firm picture of where my own "return point" or "frame of reference" is rather than getting lost in someone else's point of view.
- Seeing the social as part of the system
  - ✓ Just as a site analysis includes a plant inventory, it may also be expanded to include social norms, beliefs, perceptions, experiences, attitudes, and accounts of the past as data that is vital to the process of engaging with places as dynamic systems of relationships.

- Using every moment as an opportunity to grow, learn, trusting that there is relevance in what is shared even if the relevance is between the lines
- **Considerations:** In facilitating meaningful dialogue, sometimes having “expert” knowledge in the subject under discussion can be a hindrance to unbiased, objective leadership of the flow of dialogue. Under the pretext of “knowing less” about a subject, one can focus on the energy of the group, the balance of voices being heard, emotional charge underneath of statements made, inconsistencies in the conversation, and managing the flow of input fairly without favoring an outcome. Under what circumstances is it ethical for me to sway a public opinion towards a certain solution based on my expert knowledge? This can vary greatly from one circumstance to another.
- Emotional attachment to an outcome (clinging to it with fear, anxiety, etc.) is different from striving toward a goal. As participants with “expert” knowledge, it is important to observe our own motivations for promoting certain solutions.
- Taking risks, or speaking first without the guaranteed outcome of other parties, being vulnerable is essential to being participatory and in finding ways to engage in other people’s processes.

**Consideration: Cultivating the Practice of Being Participatory**

- Being participatory in this way is a commitment and a practice that does begin on a personal level, and carries the professional functions where they need to go. The professional is determined by the person “underneath” the role. Suspension of judgment, recognizing and challenging assumptions,

being aware of nonverbal communication all takes practice repeated practice, and are skills that expand and develop as long as one is willing to practice.

- That being said, the process, especially of reflective listening, is one that is self-correcting. Giving someone the space to be heard, if we reflect inaccurately, gives them the chance to correct and refine our understanding of the content, emotion, and their values in the process of “correction.”

### **3) Fair and accurate representation/ exclusionary tendencies / access to decision making**

**Problem:** Landscape architecture interfaces with ethical, democratic issues because it does affect a wide scope of stakeholders. Apolitical service ideals do not adequately address issues of social justice and fair representation.

- Often in participatory settings, traditional methods such as public meetings do not prove to be the most effective at creating an accurate representation of community voices and values.

#### **Approach:**

- Awareness is primary on the subtle level in this context. To participate in the process of others rather than merely inviting others to participate in our institutions, processes, and “playing fields,” we must first develop an awareness of whose processes we need to become acquainted with, develop clarity about our intentions there, why we want to develop relationship with any individual or group of stakeholders.
- Taking the wider definition of stakeholder as any person who stands to be affected by a project is in alignment with professional accountability to the

broader community and is the beginning of respecting the inherent worth and dignity of all living beings.

- A multi-technique method has been found to be more affective at achieving greater diversity in representation (Juarez, 2008). Activities such as transect walks and photo gathering allowed for greater participation by people whose schedule or other factors kept them from attending a large, formal public gathering (Juarez, 2008). This finding is supported by the principle of meeting people where they are at, rather than expecting them to conform to formal procedures, or pretending that formal forums that are inaccessible to some are sufficient to call “participatory.”

**Considerations:**

- The findings offered by Juarez illustrate the Transformative Communication principle of intention in the result. Juarez’s class was committed to finding ways to include groups and individuals that would traditionally not be captured or represented in a large public forum. These approaches were creative, yet simple. When we commit to accurate representation and access to decision making, the means by which we make this happen is a design unto itself, responding to the social conditions of the people of the site, empathizing, a method of connection can be created.

- Just as much as recommending the proper plants and materials are professional duties and responsibilities, so too does the decision to commit to being participatory or not.

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

## *In Summary*

This project harnessed some personal questions about human power and potential, and a curiosity about sculpting reality born from engaging with the boundary between art and life, and followed these through to the inner realms of self-realization and personal development in support of authentic dialogues in decision making contexts. The art and science of facilitating space for dialogue stands as a vital skillset for professionals involved in place-making where the framework and explicit emphasis on this skill development is lacking.

Emotional intelligence reveals itself to be as important as technical ability in a field that depends largely on interpersonal communication, and increasingly so. Committing oneself to becoming participatory in practice at a foundational level indicates the potential to transform ourselves, those around us, and the places we inhabit.

## *Research Directions*

A useful application moving forward could be the development of a survey inventory for a department, studio, office, group to probe assumptions that relates back to foundational values. An instrument to uncover what assumptions exist about the professional role, responsibility, culture, and attitude of landscape architects would be interesting to reveal where professionals are, and what they may need or want if interested in taking on the personal and professional project of “becoming participatory.” Structured coaching conversations often reveal connections between our external frustrations and our deeply held beliefs about ourselves and others. “How are my beliefs getting in the way of creating more

vibrant, connected communities and places?” becomes a vital question for practice. A survey / focus group could provide a common ground to discuss existing limiting beliefs and behaviors that occur in a studio, office, or classroom environment. The focus group itself would need to be a safe space with ground rules including the maintenance of confidentiality.

### *Final Thoughts*

What if the goal of design practice was the development of physical space in tandem with the development of individual and community growth? I see this question as the pathway of my previous questions about the gap between art and life. Where is the line? Which places “count” as works of art, while others are “mundane,” or why is “this” park a work of art but that one is just a playground?? What interaction is performance and another “just” an interaction? Why hold any separation between the process of creating art, and the process of living life? The blurring of the boundary between art and life set me off to inquire about sculpting reality. I didn’t know it would lead to the subtle principles of relationship, but it makes such beautiful sense if we take places to be dynamic systems of relationships.

Allowing our personal values to truly take priority over old ways of thinking about the bottom line, allowing the places we create to emanate from the spaces we hold together in community is a paradigm shift, and there is nothing wishy-washy about it. The word “community” may evoke sunshine and rainbows, and why not have such lofty goals, but sunshine and rainbows aren’t won by cutting corners, ignoring our humanity in favor of abstracted ideas about economy, or by adhering to any black and white set of protocols. This is challenging and messy work, place-making. It asks us to be engaged, committed to excellence, admitting shortcomings, making difficult decisions, facing challenges, and experiencing the full

range of human life. If places are a dynamic system of relationships, and we get to choose the nature of those relationships, do we dare reach toward the joyful existence we are capable of?

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# Appendix A

## Permaculture Ethics and Principles

### *Ethics:*

1. Care for the earth
2. Care for People
3. Return the surplus / Fair Share

### *Twelve Permaculture design principles*

As articulated by David Holmgren in his book, *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability*:

1. Observe and interact: By taking time to engage with nature we can design solutions that suit our particular situation.
2. Catch and store energy: By developing systems that collect resources at peak abundance, we can use them in times of need.
3. Obtain a yield: Ensure that you are getting truly useful rewards as part of the work that you are doing.
4. Apply self-regulation and accept feedback: We need to discourage inappropriate activity to ensure that systems can continue to function well.
5. Use and value renewable resources and services: Make the best use of nature's abundance to reduce our consumptive behavior and dependence on non-renewable resources.
6. Produce no waste: By valuing and making use of all the resources that are available to us, nothing goes to waste.
7. Design from patterns to details: By stepping back, we can observe patterns in nature and society. These can form the backbone of our designs, with the details filled in as we go.
8. Integrate rather than segregate: By putting the right things in the right place, relationships develop between those things and they work together to support each other.
9. Use small and slow solutions: Small and slow systems are easier to maintain than big ones, making better use of local resources and producing more sustainable outcomes.
10. Use and value diversity: Diversity reduces vulnerability to a variety of threats and takes advantage of the unique nature of the environment in which it resides.
11. Use edges and value the marginal: The interface between things is where the most interesting events take place. These are often the most valuable, diverse and productive elements in the system.
12. Creatively use and respond to change: We can have a positive impact on inevitable change by carefully observing, and then intervening at the right time.

Holmgren, David (2002). *Permaculture: Principles & Pathways Beyond Sustainability*. Holmgren Design Services. p. 1. ISBN 0-646-41844-0.

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# Appendix B

## NRLI Session Topics and Locations

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### 2012-2013 Schedule



Dates	Topic	Location
August 9-11, 2012	<i>Climate Change: The Impact on Aquaculture and Coastal Communities</i>	Cedar Key
September 13-15, 2012	<i>Local Planning Efforts to Address Climate Change and Sea Level Rise</i>	Punta Gorda
October 11-13, 2012	<i>The Floridan Aquifer: Balancing Use and Sustainability</i>	Lakeland
November 8-10, 2012	<i>Natural Resources and Coastal Resilience</i>	Fernandina Beach
January 10-12, 2013	<i>The Florida Keys: On the Front Line of Sea Level Rise</i>	Key Largo
February 7-9, 2013	<i>Environmental Services Provided by Agriculture</i>	Lake Placid
March 14-16, 2013	<i>Threats to a Productive Estuary</i>	Apalachicola
April 11-13, 2014	<i>Graduation and Practicum Presentations</i>	Gainesville

*Collaborative Solutions for Natural Resource Challenges*

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Climate Change and Florida: Advancing the Statewide Discussion

Source: Project Materials Provided to Fellows from NRLI Project Team 2012-13