

# Cultural Discourses of Dwelling: Investigating Environmental Communication as a Place-based Practice

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*In this essay, we contribute a response to intellectual and practical problems by presenting a perspective on environmental communication that is reflexively grounded in place. The perspective is designed to explore human relations with nature, while embracing cultural and linguistic variability. Our goals are to introduce a way to think through communication to places, and further to link that understanding to issues of engaged environmental action, to deeply seated notions of identity, and to the affective dimension of belonging that place-based communication often brings with it. Our way of doing this is to theorize and study cultural discourses of dwelling, which we explicate theoretically, then further illustrate by analyzing the discourse of adult-onset hunters. Our discussion concludes by exploring not only environmental speaking, but listening environmentally.*

*Keywords: Environmental Communication; Place; Cultural Discourse Analysis; Ethnography of Communication; Hunting; Food*

## Prolegomena<sup>1</sup>

I write these words by a window overlooking a mixed hardwood forest with a few pine and spruce trees scattered throughout. In winter, the green of their softwood needles adds color to an otherwise rich tawny scene. A large fallen oak, the casualty of a freak October snow storm, has created an open swath through the alders, reminding

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me that the weight of that storm caused our electricity to be out for a week. Since then, the winter has been relatively balmy and eerily mild. Running through these woods are three springs, typically covered in snow and frozen over this time of year but all are open now, the springs offering fresh water for birds, deer, coyotes, bears, and other beings seeking it. Each drains the west-facing slopes of Mount Tom. The mountain is itself a solidified vent of volcanic rock with a long ridge of west-facing cliffs, all of which is now largely a state reservation. Across the prominent ridge is part of a trail which runs from Long Island Sound by New York City to Mount Monadnock in southern New Hampshire, the Metacomet-Monadnock National Scenic Trail, which is named with two American Indian words, the first after a famous chief also known as King Philip, the second an Abenaki word for a type of hill that rises abruptly. From this trail, deemed “spectacular” by the Appalachian Mountain Club,<sup>2</sup> one can look east toward the rolling Massachusetts hills which surround Walden pond, north to Mount Monadnock as well as to Vermont’s Green Mountains, west to Massachusetts’ highest peak, Mount Greylock, and down into the farmland and orchards of the Connecticut River Valley including its oxbow lake, the subject of the Hudson River painter Thomas Cole’s famous painting. As I write these words, this is where I am, a place in which I live and dwell.

As you read these words, you are also somewhere in particular. Your place, as mine, has its own history, its own configuration of features, its ways of holding those who live there, its resources for living, its affordances and limitations.

### **The Primacy of Place**

The idea of place, when reflected upon, is profoundly basic in the world of human existence. As the nature writer and poet Gary Snyder (2003) put it, “the world is places” (p. 27). Each of us from the beginning, now and forever more will be emplaced somewhere, not just anywhere. This is given particular force when we reflect upon many of our well-known and celebrated environmental writers. Each has a kind of place that has captivated and held them.<sup>3</sup> In Henry David Thoreau’s essay on “walking” he writes lovingly and longingly about the “swamp” as a sacred place. John Muir has captivated us with his intricate prose about the Hetch Hetchy Valley and its inhabitants including that wonderful water ouzel. Aldo Leopold has brought us deeply into the dying eyes of a wolf while inviting us to “think like a mountain.” Terry Tempest Williams brings us into intimate contact with her Utah homeland, as earlier did Edward Abbey through his beloved desert. Wendell Berry’s words, his deep thoughts and critical principles, are planted firmly in the Kentucky soil, its farmland and community. In a different way, but no less emplaced are the recent articles in this journal concerning the “weyekin” principle of the Nez Perce in Northern Idaho (Salvador & Clarke, 2011), the economy of food in northern Honduras (Schortman, 2010), and the special issue concerning verbal and visual depictions of an urban farm in south central Los Angeles (Retzinger, 2011).

The last of these—Los Angeles—draws our attention to the importance of the urban places that are home to many and visited by others. Though I, for instance, live along

the west side of Mount Tom, verbally depicted above, at times I find myself dwelling in other kinds of places. Not long ago, I settled for a year into a fantastic downtown neighborhood in Helsinki known as Kruunu. As I sat in my office area, I could see out of my window to the beautiful Jugend-style architecture of the buildings surrounding me with their ornate designs around the windows and soffit areas. Here and there a wily gargoyle perched to keep a watchful eye over our street and its people. Routinely, as I headed into the main part of town, I went down the street in one direction and broke from the buildings and streets into a botanical garden in Kaiseniemi Park, bordered on one side by an inlet and a small lake. For recreational walking, I typically went down the street in the other direction to a small peninsula park, Tervasaari, which juts out into a bay of the Gulf of Finland, which is itself a part of the Baltic Sea. In prior times, this part of the world, now known as Helsinki, was an eastern part of the Swedish empire, then later a western port of Russia. Now it sits proudly, beautifully, and tranquilly as the capital of Finland, identified frequently as the best educated and most ecologically managed country in the world. That is where I was settled at that time, reflecting upon my place in the scheme of things.

Places such as these—those we visit and dwell within briefly, those we call home, and those from which we are sometimes displaced—serve us in particular ways as geography for our thinking, gathering our thoughts, holding our attentiveness.

As a concept, then, place is itself not only profoundly basic but also specifically special. The philosopher, Edward Casey (1996), has carefully considered the idea and proposed that it is unlike many other ideas that are abstract and general. If “place” were of that kind, it, like we, would be wrung of its site, a kind of blinded looking beyond without seeing herein. Casey (1996) dealt with this by calling place a “genuine concrete universal” that is always “operative in contingent circumstances” (p. 29). Like the woods and springs on the side of a mountain, place does its work by holding our concrete thoughts in an instantiated somewhere. Places are, to borrow Kenneth Burke’s (1966, p. 373) felicitous phrase, “the sheerly natural,” what is emphatically already *there*. And thus, when we think through places, Casey argues, we are using not a lofty abstraction, or a generic template but a concretely based “lateral universal” (Casey, 1996, p. 30). The concept does its work by aggregating thoughts of affective physical scenes we know on a concrete, contingent, serially depictive plane. A place is singularly there, as a kind of place is serially here and there, an aggregate along some dimension of similarity. The concept brings with it an accumulation of our concrete, contingently emplaced experiences, emphatically grounded in our earthly presence. And as we think about where we are, the place of our sustenance and existence, we do so in specifically situated ways, yet these can grow in their scope and scale. Place does some of its work through a nested conceptualization, from home to yard to neighborhood to larger bio-political, eventually global regions, and beyond.

Our one point of departure, then, is this: place is profoundly basic and specific as we learn and study who and where we are. The concept takes us, like celebrated others before us, to concrete and contingent circumstances which serve as the grounds of our existence, our experiences and lives. By losing sight—or touch, or feel, or smell—of our places, we risk being unsettled in our thoughts, floating above and beyond our

immediate circumstances, where we indeed live. As Mahatma Gandhi (1982, p. 5) put it, “To forget how to dig the earth and tend the soil is to forget ourselves.”<sup>4</sup> And those who tend and toil with utmost care know their place, their self, and to know it well is to learn from its own particular ways, and to speak knowledgeably about that.

### **Communication as Formative**

This introduces a second point that is equally profound and basic in the matter. We bring it to the fore by reminding the reader that the above are, after all, in an important sense, words, in this case our basic instruments of linguistic communication. These words have served us above, we hope, as a means of saying something about place and places, people and their natural environments. Through the process, we have of course used the word “place,” and the concept of place, to help situate our words, our communication as not just everywhere, or anywhere, but as drawing attention to somewhere in particular. As a result, we are drawing our readers’ attention to a dual point, to place as primary for communication, and to the fact that our communication is playing a formative, constitutive role in creating our sense of place. Our communication builds inevitably—there is no choice in the matter—our mutually intelligible sense, our shared, common, and public meanings about places. And this includes the globe and beyond—all that each holds—its people, land, animals, climate, gardens, malls, memories. The communicability of place is couched, at least partly, in this linguistic web we weave. While we return to a larger point in concluding, we want to emphasize here that communication is necessary for our craft, for making meanings about place mutually intelligible, and as our communication does so, it is both in and about place. As discussed elsewhere, our communication is “doubly placed”; it is both located in place, and, it shapes our senses of our places (Carbaugh, 1996a, p. 38).<sup>5</sup>

### **Culture: The Primacy of Propriety**

This place-setting function of communication is, moreover, deeply and radically cultural: for communication is around the world what particular people have made of it, and their resources for the making vary greatly. Manhattan developers, Native American elders, Yucatec film-makers, and Finnish environmentalists do this in various ways. Their communication, their languages, and their creative renderings with each, work in their own ways. As a result, their making is profoundly, to some important degree, always morally infused and localized. Our idea of “locality” draws upon Wendell Berry’s (2000) sense of propriety, of conduct that is fitting to its place, its circumstances, including its hopes (pp. 13–21).<sup>6</sup> This locates us within nature’s presence, in its own context, yet also utilizing local narrative history and socially managed symbolic forms, which are shaped at least partly by the work of local culture. Analysts of environmental communication, such as Cantrill and Senecah (2001), have long studied self-in-place; they have urged us to discover, to understand, and therefore work with this sort of local knowledge about places, people, their sense of who they are, how they act there, and how they feel about the place(s) in which

they dwell. In their words, “a sense of place is socially constructed upon an edifice of the environmental self that, in itself, is a product of discourse and experience” (Cantrill & Senecah, 2001, p. 188). Such recommendations, and such a view of the matter, are crucial if our study of environmental communication is to penetrate places and the various ways people dwell there.

What we hope to contribute in this essay is a response to intellectual and practical problems by using and developing a perspective on environmental communication which is reflexively grounded in place, explores human relations with nature, while embracing cultural and linguistic variability in these processes. Our response is not simple; it is multi-dimensional and complex. Our goals are to introduce a way to think through communication to cultural places, and further to link our understanding to issues of engaged environmental action, to deeply seated notions of identity, and to the affective dimension of belonging which place-based communication often brings with it. Our way of doing this is to theorize and study cultural discourses of dwelling, to which we now turn, first with a summary of our approach and then with a brief illustrative example of the approach applied.

### **Cultural Discourse: A Brief Introduction and Review**

If it is the case that communication and culture are profoundly basic to our understanding of places, then how does one go about studying places in this way? An approach we have been using and developing over the years to do such work is cultural discourse analysis (CuDA) (Berry, 2009; Carbaugh, 1996a, 1996b, 2005, 2007a; Scollo, 2011). The approach derives from the ethnography of communication (Carbaugh, 2010; Hymes, 1972; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005), while standing at the juncture of cultural communication and speech codes theory (Philipsen, 1997, 2002; Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005). With it, we take communication to be emplaced action that is culturally distinctive, socially negotiated, and individually applied. A basic tenet of the approach is that communication is a radically situated and cultural practice; it is emplaced, message-endowed action which includes the deep meanings being both presumed for and created in that very action.

By attending to communication in this way, and the web of meanings activated through it, we understand any communication practice to be part of a larger expressive system. There is an important kind of thinking—of part-whole relations—in this, for as one focuses on a specific communication practice, such as a land-use debate, a larger system(s) of practice is brought into view, such as democratic government, and as the larger system comes into view it provides specific symbolic context(s) for discovering, interpreting, and critically evaluating that one communication practice. By exploring a practice and the various expressive systems—such as educational, environmental, medical, legal, political systems—in which it plays a part, we learn more about the specific practice of concern (Carbaugh, Gibson, & Milburn, 1997). Like a piece or a part of a puzzle, each—the practice and its place—provides context for the other.

As symbolic or message-endowed action, communication practice is understood to be systemic and practical action that is particularly meaningful to participants. These

cultural messages can be interpreted along a dimension—from those made explicit in the content of the message, to those more implicit which participants take-for-granted in doing that action. Based upon prior ethnographic fieldwork, we have formulated a conceptual framework of *five discursive hubs* for exploring various practices of cultural discourses. Each discursive hub has assumed a kind of deep resonance across various ethnographic studies. These five discursive hubs pertain to identity, action, feeling, relating, and dwelling. Each becomes explicit when it is so made in participants' communication practice. For example, the discursive hub of identity becomes explicit when people use pronouns and identity terms—for example, "We are Tibetan farmers"—and the like to say who they are; the discursive hub of action becomes explicit as people use terms which identify the action they are doing—for example, "resource management" or "sustainable practice," actions which can also include terms about communication such as "conflict management" or "negotiation"; emotion becomes explicit as people discuss the feeling they have—for example, their "pride" or "shame" or "loyalty" in their hometown; social relations become explicit as people identify relations as "those from around here," kin, political allies, enemies in war, party affiliations, and the like; and dwelling comes to the fore as people name or depict their places, using place-names, stories, and the like (which we treat in detail below). Our theory, therefore, draws to the fore these five discursive hubs, any one of which may be explored as explicitly woven into communication depending upon the local practice(s) of concern.

The basic points to here are these: communication is understood to be a cultural and emplaced practice; when practiced, communication makes explicit some meanings more than others; based upon prior research we know there are at least five potentially deep discursive hubs and their meanings which can be prominently featured in cultural conversation; when used, these constitute and form a discursive web of who we are (about identity), what we are doing (regarding action), how we feel about things (our emotion), how we are linked to others (in relations), and the nature of things (by dwelling there). Any one hub about identity, or action, or emotion, or relations, or dwelling may be made explicit in discourse; as any one is made an explicit discursive hub of concern, the others may tag along as part of its implicit meanings.

Part of the importance in understanding cultural discourses through discursive hubs is interpreting the more taken-for-granted, implicit meanings brought along in participants' discourses. This involves the interpretive work of the ethnographer which helps us listen deeply into what is indeed "getting said." Our way of doing this is as follows: as we conduct our studies, we fix on one discursive hub at a time, for example, on identity, or self, and ask first how people around here communicate explicitly about people through their various discursive devices such as symbols of identity, uses of pronouns, terminology about social roles, and the like. This tracks a cultural discourse of identity, which has been treated in detail elsewhere (Carbaugh, 1996b; cf. Myers, 2006). As this discursive hub is made explicit or literal, and comes into view, however, people are typically presuming and creating other more implicit or figurative meanings, for example, about where they are, how they feel about

things, and who they are with. We call this complex of explicit meanings about a discursive hub plus the implicit meanings attached to it, a *meta-cultural commentary* and by that we mean, in our example here, the following: as people talk about identity explicitly, they also may be saying something more implicitly about their actions (what they are doing as someone like that), their dwelling (where they are), their emotions (how they feel about things), and their social relations (who they are with or against). Being able to understand and interpret the meta-cultural commentary in communication practice helps cultural analysts penetrate the surface of meanings, to the deeper significance and importance of the matters at hand. This interpretive work is a key objective of cultural discourse analyses.

Our analytic procedure presumes then, that, at times, various meanings radiate from communication practice, and thus we distinguish between them as follows: explicit meanings are from and about an explicit discursive hub of concern (e.g., what identity terms say about identity); implicit meanings are also active when a discursive hub is in use, in that practice (e.g., what identity terms collectively imply about social relationships). We visualize these meanings as radiating from communication practice. The more culturally rich or dense is the communication practice, the brighter and wider is the semantic radiation. As a conceptual device, we call the meanings, semantic *radiants* or radiants of meaning, with these emanating from any explicit discursive hub of concern.

Our overall view of a cultural discourse is this: a set of communication practices—acts, events, and styles—which is treated as a historically transmitted expressive system of symbols, symbolic forms, norms, and their meanings. CuDA rigorously employs *five modes of analysis*: *theoretical* analyses which conceptualize communication as formative of meanings about relations between people and place, between sentient beings and their natural environment; *descriptive* analyses as they document specific communication practices in the context of their use; *interpretive* analyses as they explicate meanings, cultural premises and propositions—both explicit and implicit—at work in those practices; *comparative* analyses as they explore similarities and differences in communication practice cross-culturally; and *critical* analyses as they evaluate practices from an explicitly formulated ethical juncture (Carbaugh, 2007a).

### **Cultural Discourse of Dwelling: Three Local Landscapes for Adult-onset Hunters**

Our purpose in the following parts of the essay, following earlier groundwork (Carbaugh, 1996a), is to provide an illustrative case of cultural discourse when dwelling is made the explicit discursive hub of concern.<sup>7</sup> We will do so in two steps. First, we discuss specific communication phenomena, or particular discursive devices which make dwelling explicit. Next, we work with some of these ideas—and the broader framework summarized above—by analyzing a cultural discourse about that deeply human practice, hunting (and gathering), as it is done in the New England region of North America.

There are various types of discursive practice through which people presume and construct place, “where they are” and “the nature of things.” We note a growing

literature of this sort which has explored green roots in Finland and nature writing (Carbaugh, 1996a; Rautio, 2011), Native and local American discourses about landscapes (Carbaugh, 1996b, 1999, 2005; Carbaugh & Rudnick, 2006; Carbaugh & Wolf, 1999; cf. Brady, 2011), cultural discourses about water and waste (Morgan, 2003, 2007), nonverbal communication with and from nature (Scollo, 2004), contaminated water and landscape restoration (Gilbertz & Milburn, 2011), a Hispanic discourse of relations-in-place (Milstein, Anguiano, Sandoval, Chen, & Dickinson, 2011), as well as whales' speaking and tourists' communication with nature (Milstein, 2008, 2011). Such a literature demonstrates not only the power of different languages in formulating cultural discourses such as English, Finnish, and Spanish, but moreover how each does so by crafting its particular sense of place. As a result, these analyses of various communication practices have demonstrated how cultural discourse plays a formative role in place-based communication, relating environments and people, defining nature's existence into social being.

Cultural discourses of dwelling necessarily involve a wide range of communication practices including, for example, verbal depictions of place, formulations of locations, giving directions, symbolic representations of animals, topographic depiction, various sorts of visual communication, and the like. Here we give special attention, based upon prior studies, to several important candidate practices which explicitly activate the discursive hub of dwelling. These may be thought of generally as "ethno-physical nomenclature" (Carbaugh, 1996a, p. 43) including verbal renderings of landscapes, water, plants, animals, and bodies. For illustrative purposes below, we will array data that demonstrate practices including place-naming, verbal depictions of place, as well as something perhaps more basic, "spatial deixis" or the expressive references (e.g., through "here" and "that" and pointing) to immediate physical circumstances.

Note that our attention is turned here to specific discursive devices which link people to places, rendering them intelligible in particular ways, with specific meanings. This is a tactic of analysis designed to draw attention to such devices, and for analytic purposes to take them apart. In the end, the analysis seeks to put them back together again, with the hope of enriching our understanding of that cultural discourse, making what was typically fleeting and inscrutable, available for deeper deliberative reflection.

We draw from a larger study about verbal interpretations of New England hunting grounds where—among others—nontraditional hunters dwell. By non-traditional we mean that these are hunters who did not hunt as children or teenagers, yet, in adulthood have for the first time taken up hunting. We present, below, deliberately without much introduction, three hunters' comments from a larger corpus of data (Cerulli, 2011). The first two excerpts come from interviews with female hunters, Yvonne and Carol, both in their thirties, both residing in the state of Maine. The third comes from an interview with a male hunter in his forties, Frank, who resides in the state of Vermont. We follow each with brief analyses of "the discursive devices, cultural propositions and premises" that are active in their discourse.<sup>8</sup>



*Yvonne's Lament about Old Maine*

As a Mainer, I'm deeply saddened to see the culture of Maine really fading in terms of the Old Maine, and the sportsmen and women, and the Maine Guide culture, and the hunting camps. And the rural integrity of this place has really been degraded a lot by the natural forces of society and people moving to Maine and development like is going on everywhere. But the Maine accent is getting increasingly hard to come across. It's really old-timers that have it now. And for me it [hunting] is sort of like carrying that torch of the history of this place. This place used to be teeming with people that knew how to go out and who had skills in the woods, hunting and beyond, and that self-sufficiency of having huge gardens and fishing and deer hunting. And it's really a thing of the past now.<sup>9</sup>

Note that this excerpt begins with a naming both of place and of self-in-place, as Yvonne self-identifies "as a Mainer." Yvonne then draws explicit links between the place named and its cultural tradition ("the culture of Maine," "the Old Maine," "the history of this place," "the rural integrity of this place"). She discursively ties this place-based tradition to particular practices of interacting with the land ("skills in the woods," "hunting," "fishing," "having huge gardens," "self-sufficiency"), practiced by particular people ("sportsmen and women," "old-timers"), and also to a particular way of speaking ("the Maine accent"). Note, then, that through a set of discursive devices—a place name, its tradition, skills, people, and way of speaking—Yvonne activates a discourse of dwelling.

We may wonder what meanings Yvonne is expressing through these discursive devices. We can begin an interpretation of them by formulating several cultural propositions—statements that employ some of Yvonne's key symbolic terms to express a taken-for-granted view. In doing so, we begin by staying deliberately close to the terms of Yvonne's discourse; we work toward the objective of understanding and making explicit the semantic logic in such discourse. Some of the cultural propositions at work concerning Yvonne's discourse of dwelling include the following [and we also note the hub(s) explicitly active in it]:

- "The culture of Maine" ("the Old Maine") is a matter of "the rural integrity" and "the history" of "this place" [dwelling].
- "The culture of Maine" is related to "the Maine Guide culture" and to "the hunting camps" [dwelling].
- "The culture of Maine" is embodied by "sportsmen and women," people who have the "skills" necessary for the "self-sufficiency" of having large "gardens," "fishing," and "deer hunting" "in the woods" [identity, action].
- "The culture of Maine" is lamented as "fading," being "degraded," and becoming "a thing of the past" [emotion].
- As "the culture of Maine" fades, so does the "the Maine accent"; only "old-timers" have it [emotion, identity, dwelling].
- As "a Mainer," one feels "deeply saddened" to see "the Old Maine" "fading" [emotion, identity, dwelling].

In this excerpt and the propositions formulated about it, we can hear a deeply felt sense of a place (“Maine”) and its meaning over time to successive generations of “Mainers.” That meaning is clearly articulated in terms of particular cultural practices in relation to place; that is, in terms of how people interact with the land. The apparent changes in those cultural practices (the “fading” and “degrading” of “the culture of Maine”) are spoken of as a lament, a deeply felt loss (“deeply saddened”) that can, in part, be forestalled by continuing certain practices of relating to place (“carrying that torch of the history of this place”).

In any given utterance or symbolic term, one or more discursive hubs (identity, action, emotion, relating, dwelling) are made explicit, while other semantic radiants tag along silently as part of the discourse, contributing to the meaning of the utterance or term without being named therein. For instance, in the very first utterance above (“As a Mainer, I’m deeply saddened to see the culture of Maine really fading”), the hubs of identity (“Mainer”), dwelling (“Mainer”), and emotion (“saddened”) are made explicit. Implicitly radiating from these hubs are other meanings (e.g., action, as in how a “Mainer” should interact with the land).

We will return to the above data and observations below. Now, though, we turn to a second interview excerpt.

### *Carol’s Place and Being There*

Because they’ve been hunting there so long my dad and grandfather and uncle can say so much about what’s changed and what hasn’t. I mean down to the little—“That rock wasn’t there the last time we were here.” Just like little things that they would know and become familiar with, and only, only through that sort of an experience, not necessarily hunting but really interacting on the land, do you get to know it in that way. My grandfather points out the logging roads—“Those weren’t there forty years ago”—and that’s bothersome to him. It doesn’t mean anything to me, I think they’re beautiful and make travel a little bit easier but to him they’re bothersome because that’s not how it was and the land’s not as perfect as it used to be, in his mind.

In this excerpt, Carol speaks of a place where her family has hunted for many years. She draws a clear link between those longtime hunting experiences in that place and what these men “know,” are “familiar with,” and “can say.” A longtime practice in a specific place (“interacting on the land”) is, Carol says, necessary for us to “get to know” the land well enough to notice small details like a rock that has moved or to be bothered by larger scale changes (“logging roads”) that might be taken for granted by the relative newcomer. Note, too, that her verbal depiction of these men’s speech is filled with deictic references (“that rock,” “there,” “the last time we were here,” “those weren’t there”), each presuming past experiences and stories of that place, as well as physical presence in that place at the time of utterance. Discursive devices such as these amplify the importance and exclusive role in actually being there in order to understand a place, and to know how it has changed.

In this second excerpt, we can identify a small set of cultural propositions which draw attention to some of the meanings in her place-based discourse:

- Only through “interacting” do you get to “know” “the land” [dwelling, action].
- Through long-term interaction, you “become familiar with” “the land,” all the way down to “little things” like the position of a particular “rock” [dwelling, action].
- The meaning of changes to the land, like the establishment of “logging roads,” depends on how long you have “known” a place [dwelling, action].

In Carol’s verbal depiction of this place, we can hear a deeply felt sense of the value in becoming familiar with the small details of its particularity over the course of many years. The familiarity—knowing and a long-term perspective—is said to be possible only through “interacting on the land” over time. And longtime interaction with a particular place is, in turn, necessary for speaking of (and in) that very place in certain ways, allowing one to “say so much” about the land and the changes that have occurred there.

Note again how one or more discursive hubs are made explicit in each moment, with radiants tagging along as part of the discourse. For instance, when Carol says that “only through . . . really interacting on the land do you get to know it in that way,” the hubs of action (“interacting”) and dwelling (“land,” “know”) are made explicit. Implicitly radiating from these hubs are other meanings (e.g., what such interaction and knowledge say about one’s identity and how one feels about the land).

Before discussing these observations further, we turn to the third interview excerpt mentioned above.

#### *Frank’s Verbal Depiction of Land*

The land itself is pretty steep, and wooded. It’s partly land that we nominally own and partly land that we nominally don’t, that the neighbors own. But it’s a relatively large tract of quite steep and interesting land. And because it’s steep like that, I’m never on it other times of the year. For farming we don’t have any activities there. A lot of it is too steep even for cutting wood, too steep for running and skiing and things like this, so partly it’s such a great time of year because suddenly I’m immersed in this aspect of the landscape that I only see in passing at other times of the year. It also happens that it’s this sort of Champlain Valley, low, hemlock-and-red-oak ecosystem, so it’s incredible deer habitat. So the chances of seeing a deer are relatively good . . . By being in the same spot year after year after year, it just develops this depth and complexity of my relationship to that space, that spot . . . It’s really fun to refer to a piece of land in shorthand, to be able say, you know, “You go to that butternut where we missed that one.” “Oh, yeah, right.” “Okay, I’m going around the corner where da-da-da.” . . . I’ll be out on the land with other people I don’t hunt with, and I’ll feel the lack of that. All these people, they’re seeing this for the first time, so I can’t tell them whatever the thing is.

Note that this excerpt is rich with verbal depictions of the particular place where Frank hunts—“steep,” “wooded,” “interesting,” “low,” “hemlock-and-red-oak ecosystem,” “incredible deer habitat”—situated within a larger named place, the “Champlain Valley.” He draws our attention to how the terrain defines his interactions with it, as it is too steep for farming, running, skiing, or even cutting wood. Only certain kinds of experiences and traditions (such as hunting) can take

root there, making deer season a special time to be “immersed” in a special place. Over time (“year after year after year”), that immersion is said to lead to a “depth and complexity” of “relationship to that space, that spot.” Frank feels a deep stewardship to the place, one he says he “nominally owns,” inviting his interlocutor to reflect upon the limits of ownership.

Frank’s verbal depictions bring larger systems of practice into view. What is it to properly own, care for, and develop land? His emphasis on this theme invites questioning of traditional models of private landholding. His talk of a “hemlock-and-red-oak ecosystem” which is “incredible deer habitat” further draws our attention to the scientific study of ecological relationships. This discourse about the landscape, relations with it, and scientific study, in turn, provides us with some of his symbolic contexts for examining this place. Note, too, that Frank speaks of how he and his hunting companions can talk about the places they know, employing deictic references (“that butternut where we missed that one,” “the corner where da-da-da”) which serve as shorthand evocations of past experiences and stories, each shared in that place. By the same token, a lack of such shared experience in place (“seeing this for the first time”) can prohibit certain ways of speaking (“I can’t tell them whatever the thing is”).

About this third excerpt, we can formulate several cultural propositions:

- There is something “great” about being “immersed” in an “aspect of the landscape” that you usually only “see in passing” [dwelling, feeling].
- “Being” in a particular place “year after year” develops a “depth” and “complexity” of “relationship” to that place, a stewardship of “nominal” ownership [dwelling].
- Shared activities on the land allow people to “refer” to it in “shorthand” [dwelling, relating, acting].
- With people who do not share those experiences, who are “seeing this” for the first time, you “can’t tell them” certain things [dwelling, relating, acting].

In this excerpt, a distinct landscape is depicted, one that permits certain kinds of human activities and constrains others. Those very constraints—combined with a pattern of returning to the same places “year after year after year”—are said to contribute to a complex, deeply felt relationship to particular places, developed by way of a particular interactive practice (in this case, deer hunting). That relationship, in turn, has implications for communicative relationships with other humans, permitting one to say and tell certain things to certain people, but not to others.

As in the previous two examples, explicit hubs and implicit radiants work together, discursively weaving a meta-cultural commentary. For instance, when Frank says that “being in the same spot year after year after year, it just develops this depth and complexity of my relationship to that space, that spot,” the hub of dwelling (“being in,” “relationship to that space”) is made explicit. Implicitly radiating from it are other meanings (e.g., what sorts of action cultivate this quality of dwelling, how experiences of dwelling and relationships with other people infuse one another with meaning).

Finally, taking a step laterally across these three sets of emplaced discursive details, we can turn our attention to a few of the connections among them, across these excerpts and the discursive devices employed in each. We can, for instance, propose several cultural premises—statements that capture the features of certain terms and propositions which are active across these data. Our aim here is to make the cultural logic in the discourse, its radiants of belief and of value, more readily visible for consideration.

- Relationship with place is important and deeply felt.
- Our sense/knowledge of a place and its meanings is rooted in how we interact with and on the land.
- Our sense/knowledge of ourselves-in-place is rooted in how we interact with and on the land.
- Meaningful relationships with place can only be developed through this interaction.
- Meaningful relationships with place can only be developed over time (years and generations).
- Our ability to speak of, to speak in, and listen to a place is rooted in these, our (shared) relationships with it.

The propositions and premises we formulate here explicate meanings which radiate from the discursive devices we describe above. For example, the first two premises above identify messages about dwelling in a place, and about acting in that place; the third links a premise of identity to these radiants of dwelling-in-place; similarly, the fourth links a premise of relating to a proper form of action, interacting-in-place; the fifth speaks to the importance of history and local knowledge; and with the last premise we draw attention to an implicit communicative ability that is active through these data, an ability which requires place-based roots, a rooting which Yvonne fears is passing, yet Carol and Frank delight in depicting.

### **Listening and Speaking Environmentally**

We hope our analyses above demonstrate, if ever so briefly, and simply, several points which are central in our thinking. As Yvonne laments the decay of “Old Maine,” she employs discursive devices of dwelling such as place-names, attaching symbols of identity to them, and describing the proper activities for those who dwell there. The goals of “rural integrity” and proper “self-sufficiency” are mentioned and given a renewed and renewable voice. Carol delights in her intimate depiction of her familial place, and the knowledge gained by being there in it, which cannot be known, she says, in any other way. Frank’s vocabulary gives voice to a place dear to him and his companions, a place about which he speaks deeply and lovingly, a place beyond “owning” in its traditional usage. For each, there is something special about being in a place, interacting with it, knowing it, being able to reference it knowing others similarly placed will understand exactly

what that means. And of course we must be reminded of the additional point; not knowing a place or not being there is to not understand it in this way. This would be a self-without-its-discursive-place, that is, to have the discourse emptied of its culture, without its practices of emplaced dwelling, without the local knowledge gained by being there. And of course it is a lament about this deficit in the propriety of place that is the theme of Yvonne's discourse of "Old Maine," being one who has lost one's situated senses (cf. Scollo, 2004).

These brief snippets of discourses of dwelling help establish how one can come to know, analyze, describe, interpret, and reflect upon how natured environments are discursively constructed and employed. The place-setting snippets can also aid us in our return to, and development of, our starting points: environmental communication is, inevitably, a place-based form of communication; it is dually placed as it occurs in some places rather than others, and as it makes sense of place in some ways rather than others. At least some of our studies would do well to attend to this dynamic, to discourses of dwelling, as we reflect upon where we are and thus ground our thoughts while momentarily anchored in a cultural locality. We can do so by listening for the discursive devices people use to make place, nature, and dwelling there explicit, such as place-names, depictions of places including stories, ethno-physical nomenclature, and spatial deixis, to which we return below. By interpreting the cultural messages being presumed for and in that discourse, by formulating cultural propositions and premises at work within it, we can understand better the meanings of place that are significant and important to the people here and there, as opposed to anywhere else.

We are instructed in our approach to discourses of dwelling by Wendell Berry's thoughts about propriety, which we mentioned in the beginning and to which we return here, especially as he writes:

The idea of propriety makes an issue of the fittingness of our conduct to our place or circumstances, even to our hopes. It acknowledges the always-pressing realities of context and of influence; we cannot speak or act or live out of context. Our life inescapably affects other lives, which inescapably affect our life. We are being measured, in other words, by a standard we did not make and cannot destroy. It is by that standard, and only by that standard, that we know we are in a crisis in our relationship to nature. (Berry, 2000, p. 13)

Those readers familiar with Berry's works will know the "standard" which he invokes here is, in a word, "nature." To him, nature is the measure of good living (Berry, 1993). And by nature he means a local living landscape, what it offers to those who dwell there, and what it permits them to do. A gripping essay of his titled "Damage" describes his over-zealous effort to create a pond on a sloping hillside, which did not end well (Berry, 1993, pp. 5–8). Nature did not permit such action, just as the land Frank hunts is too steep to permit logging. It is in this sense that people live within "nature" and it is their nature which provides the measure of the good. Such an attitude requires humility in knowing where we are, by discerning through nature's various communicative means what it allows and limits in dwelling there. Berry goes on:

...the [academic] disciplines are failing the test of propriety because they are failing the test of locality. The professionals of the disciplines don't *care* where they are. Though they are inescapably in context, they assume or pretend that they think and work without context. (Berry, 2000, p. 15)

Our proposal to treat environmental communication as a complex matrix of cultural discourses is one effort to do so, to keep in view context and “conduct.” We argue that any environmental discourse is so placed, as Berry argues about Edward Wilson’s treatise on *Consilience* (Berry, 2000). This is so even in versions of science which may be caught not only within the confines of one language, but moreover within one displaced and abstract dialect of it, for one small community, in other words, in its own cultural discourse of dwelling nowhere in particular. Our efforts are designed then not only to inquire about New England discourse and the like, but also to ground discourses in the place of their own making and to draw attention to that place (even if nowhere) and what has been made of it (even if not much). By attending to discourse and place, a critical power in such study can be realized. What have we discursively made of this place and what does it permit of us? In responding, we work to properly cultivate our sense of place, and in so doing our concept of place does its lateral, concrete, contingent, and serially accumulative work. A coupling of this concept with cultural research into discourses, and ethnography more generally, creates prospects we find quite promising. But there is more.

The further promise is evident in well-known studies like Keith Basso’s (1996) of western Apache place-naming and stories, or in the clash between Native American and non-Native discourses about places (Brady, 2011; Carbaugh & Rudnick, 2006; Salvador & Clarke, 2011). It is evident also in recent studies of Finnish renderings of nature (Rautio, 2011), Hispanic constructions of human–nature relations in place (Milstein et al., 2011), as well as verbal depictions of the landscape in a Montana Milltown (Gilbertz & Milburn, 2011). We mention these studies not only because they analyze cultural discourses in and about places, but also because different languages are explored in each, including western Apache, Finnish, Spanish, and English. Just as we benefit from exploring particularities of place, so we benefit from embracing the diversity of discourses in and about places. In the wake of a tidal wave of immigration in the early 1900s, the early American pragmatist Josiah Royce (1908) wrote about the value in “positive provincialism,” that is, in knowing deeply where one is from, but further in actively seeking to understand how others elsewhere have come to know their place(s) in the world as well. By seeking to know others’ places in the world—whether urban, suburban, exurban, or rural—one can broaden one’s understanding and better understand one’s own. As we study environmental discourses of dwelling, we employ such a comparative, cross-cultural, and cross-linguistic ethic, thereby knowing better where we are as we learn where others are as well.

There is a final key part of such discourse that we want to emphasize as we conclude. It is that part of dwelling discourse which we have called “spatial deixis,” the devices which require context for their practical sense or meaning such as the

adverbs “here” and “there” or the demonstratives “this” and “that.” Earlier works have analyzed how deeply symbolic are deictic phrases such as “up on the project” and “at the foot of the mountain” (Carbaugh, 1996b, pp. 157–190). What we have in mind is their use in a natural environment, perhaps accompanied by a pointing gesture (Milstein, 2011), as we can imagine Carol’s grandfather pointing in the scene she suggests: “That rock wasn’t there the last time we were here.” Through this sort of situated discursive device, one has access to multiple means or channels of communication in a context, including sight, sound, smell, and the feel of the thing or place. All of the senses are potentially drawn upon. This deictic process of identifying and referencing the natural world activates deeper, and dare we say primordial, ways of knowing that are less active in textbooks or here on this printed page. If we imagine a sunny scene on a high mountain ridge in the Northern Cascades as we look forward to Glacier Peak and hear an utterance of “wow!” we can conjure an image, and as important as “that” is, it is not, as Carol reminds us, the same as being there. In the other direction, walking the Gulf Coast after the British Petroleum oil spill leads us elsewhere, from the sublime to the oil slime. In either case, as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1987) put it, “we know more from nature than we can at will communicate” (p. 19). This is the power of places, in their ability to communicate with or to us as we are there in them. This deictic discourse is essential as a means, and often as a corrective means, of enhancing our efforts to know and reference our places, to quote them, or at least to point them out (Carbaugh, 2007b).

And as we do, as we use the various discursive devices available to us, we communicate our nature and our environments in linguistically and culturally particular ways. It is these ways, including nature’s ways, we can and must study. Our efforts to address urban sprawl (Cantrill, Thompson, Garrett, & Rochester, 2007), environmental sustainability (Larson, 2011), food sources (Cerulli, 2012; Opel, Johnston, & Wilk, 2010), forest conservation (Dickinson, 2011), water management (Morgan, 2003), national park management (Spence, 1999; Weaver, 1996), restorative practices and tourism management (Milstein, 2011), important counter-discourses of place (Sinter, 2011), to construct better arguments about climate change (Schweizer, Thompson, Teel, & Bruyere, 2009), or in our studies of eco-whatever, are inevitably couched in such a discourse(s), just as each is situated relative to others. Examining each matter in these ways will give each its due, while allowing us to build with the range in view. To quote Wendell Berry (1993, p. 166) yet again, “The only true and effective ‘operator’s manual for spaceship earth’ is not a book that any human will ever write; it is hundreds of thousands of local cultures.” As we come to know these matters through their discourses, we must, however, never forget that nature’s “place,” the “being” that is indeed already “there” is also speaking, or in Emerson’s words it is saying “more” and it is “that” more that we must somehow strive also to “know.” Some cultural discourses indeed valorize this part of the environmental communication process (Carbaugh, 1999, 2005, pp. 100–119; Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2011; cf. Schutten & Rogers, 2011), while others for all practical purposes render it mute (see Berry, 2000). Children—or indeed all of us—who are unable to hear that “more” may be afflicted with a “nature deficit disorder” (Lou,



2005). A crucial objective, to the extent it is even possible, is to bring into view—or hear, feel, smell—nature’s emplaced discourse with our own.

So, here I sit. Snow flurries are falling now but not gathering on the ground. The hardwood forest before me is ready to bud. A herd of six deer just jumped and ran from the biggest spring up the hill with their white tails warning anyone who noticed. Their route was the same one a gang of four-wheelers followed as I ran chasing them in vain out of my backyard. We are all struggling to know and properly use this place. I guess you, dear reader, like Yvonne, Carol, and Frank, are also so engaged, in your own emplaced way. If we are to know the “place” of environmental communication, we must re-dedicate ourselves to knowing our places, “being here” and “going there,” and to knowing each through our various discourses of dwelling. There is much we have to learn—about your places and mine, including how we *come* to know them—through these processes.

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### Notes

- [1] The first person singular refers to Donal Carbaugh, who drafted the earlier and latter sections of the article.
- [2] See Appalachian Mountain Club trail guide, section 6, of the Metacomet-Monadnock trail description, <http://www.amcberkshire.org/node/25>. The M-M trail in this section was certified as a “National Recreation Trail” by National Park Service (NPS) in 2001, and a “National Scenic Trail” by the NPS in 2009.
- [3] The following draw, for example, upon Henry David Thoreau’s (1950) essay, “Walking,” from *Walden and other writings* (ed. B. Atkinson; pp. 597–632), New York: The Modern Library; John Muir’s (1980) essays as collected in *The wilderness world of John Muir* (ed. E. Teale), Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company; Aldo Leopold’s *A sand county almanac*, New York: Ballantine Books; Terry Tempest Williams’ (2002), *Red: Passion and patience in the desert*, New York: Vintage; Edward Abbey’s (1988) *Desert solitaire*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press; and Wendell Berry’s (1993), *What are people for?*, San Francisco: North Point Press.
- [4] We thank Catherine Cerulli for drawing this quote to our attention.
- [5] Our point echoes earlier of our writings and Craig’s (1999) theorizing about the constitutive nature of communication.
- [6] Our overall perspective is developed in detail elsewhere (Berry, 2009; Carbaugh, 1996a, 1996b, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Scollo, 2011).
- [7] We emphasize that our analyses in what follows are illustrative and suggestive, not definitive or comprehensive.
- [8] The quotes here draw attention to technical concepts being used for purposes of this sort of analysis. See Carbaugh (2007a, 2007b).

- [9] The data segments produced here by Yvonne, and below by Carol and Frank, are from Cerulli (2011).

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