

THE CONTEMPORARY HOMESTEAD:
A REGIONAL MOMENT IN AN AMERICAN MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

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The Contemporary Homestead: A regional moment in an American movement
(Under the direction of Glenn Hinson)

Contemporary homesteaders, who privilege home and garden as places in which to make meaning and enact social, political, economic, and cultural values, are the current generation of an American movement that has advocated going ‘back to the land’ since the late 1800s. The movement has been progressive at times, focused on the future, and nostalgic at times, lamenting a lost past. This thesis argues that contemporary homesteaders are unique in that they turn to both the past *and* the future for information and inspiration. Grounded in ethnographic fieldwork with five families across the Carolinas, this thesis locates the current moment regionally and investigates the ironies and gaps of contemporary homesteading, as well as its performative dimensions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“My ideal world?” Joe Hollis repeated my question, and then he answered it:

“Everything I needed I would be able to get from my garden. That would be the ideal. . . . It wasn’t all that long ago that people [lived that way]. Just a hundred years ago the people that lived here [in rural Appalachia] were virtually self-sufficient” (2013d). Joe Hollis snuggled down into the worn chair on his bird’s nest of a porch and looked out over the four-acre western North Carolina homestead that he calls Mountain Gardens. His garden, home to several thousand varieties of useful plants, is dotted with simple buildings like his home, the place where we sat during this mid-summer interview, a three-story wooden structure cobbled together with scavenged materials and lumber harvested on site. From this vantage point Hollis can watch the day unfold across his property—wildlife in the intensively terraced fruit orchard, an apprentice tending lettuce in the vegetable garden and another splitting firewood at the community kitchen, a volunteer tincturing medicinal herbs harvested on site—all of it a chorus that sings beautifully after 40 years of investment and experimentation.

“You talk about ‘paradise gardening,’” I said, naming the term Hollis uses to describe his philosophy and life’s work. “Is this it? Have you achieved it?” The lushness of the hillside below us and the rainforest-esque symphony of birdcalls that overwhelms the recording certainly suggest that he has. “No,” Hollis answered, “[that] is a goal that’s out there in the very, very far distance. I think it takes several generations to really get where I

think we should be.” When I asked about his long-term vision for Mountain Gardens, he continued, “Well, I hope that it gets to a self-sustaining place and will keep moving forward, becoming ever-more interesting and diverse, fertile and enriched, and support[ive of more] people. Turn into sort of a community, I hope. . . . I think it would be interesting to see how many people could be supported here” (2013d).

Hollis is a contemporary homesteader. Like other homesteaders, he endeavors to produce as much as possible on his land, a response to the ills of our time, including, but not limited to, a crisis of economy, political system, and social relations that marks, according to Hollis and others like him, this turn of the 21st century. Hollis’s commitment to home and garden as a place to enact change and make meaning is not a new one; the contemporary homesteader draws from a long tradition of going ‘back to the land’ in America. What sets the contemporary homesteader apart, though, from the generations of back-to-the-landers that have come before her, is where she turns for inspiration and direction.¹ As Hollis explained to me that afternoon in late June, he looks backwards, using a real and imagined past to inform the way that he should live in the present, and he looks to the future, envisioning a time when life will be markedly different from the imperfect present. Simultaneously holding these two temporal points—past and future—as sources of inspiration and instruction in the face of an inevitably messy present sets this moment in America’s back-to-the-land tradition apart from its predecessors. In this thesis, I explore this moment as it is unfolding in the American South.

The first section of the thesis poses the research questions and theoretical approaches that guided my work; after presenting essential definitions and discussing my methodology,

¹Contemporary homesteaders are both women and men and I alternate between the pronouns “he” and “she” throughout this thesis to reflect this balance.

it closes by exploring how ideas about “group” pertain to this project. The next chapter positions the homesteading present within the history of the back-to-the-land movement in America. The third chapter introduces my consultants and their homesteads; I embed the heart of my argument—that this moment in the movement orients itself, for the first time, both towards the past *and* towards the future—here in the descriptions of contemporary homesteaders. The fourth chapter locates this project in the landscape of the American South. The final chapter discusses the ironies and gaps of the contemporary homesteading movement, the balancing act necessary to navigate these gaps, and the performative dimension of homesteading. I close by re-grounding this research in a deep respect for these homesteaders’ endeavors.

Guiding research questions

The media has examined individuals like Hollis in predictable places—Portland, Oregon; Brooklyn, New York; and Detroit, Michigan—positioning the ideology of contemporary homesteading as a politically-engaged movement. Scholarly literature, however, is just beginning to capture and analyze this movement in the American South (Turman-Deal 2013). My research investigates how Hollis and others like him enact expressions of a national social movement in North and South Carolina.

Throughout this thesis, I consider homestead design and maintenance as performance, and read them as manifestations of expressive culture. In so doing, I use homesteading as a lens to understand contemporary American culture, replete with our social anxieties, economic woes, and shifting political landscapes. I also explore homesteading as an engine for entrepreneurship (Rich 2012), and read the network of homesteads across North and South Carolina as an alternative work landscape in the American South. Cognizant of the vibrant intellectual and philosophical engagement with the arts and labor of self-sufficiency

that characterizes the movement, the thesis asks how contemporary homesteading offers itself as an embodied commentary, a physical manifestation of political and social values.

As home becomes again a place of labor and laborlore, my research probes the motivations and narratives of those who homestead, their stories of success *and* failure, and the articulated theories and philosophies behind their engagement. This then leads to a discussion of the gaps between theory and application. Honoring Archie Green's approach to the ethnography of American labor and workplaces, I consider both the "skills of hand and the abundant cultural practices that define and sustain" this particular work tradition in the American South (Burns 2011, xvi).

And in a shift away from folkloristics—a shift demanded by my consultants themselves—I ask what homesteading can reveal as a spiritual practice. If we plant the Judeo-Christian identity in the garden, as spirituality scholar Norman Wirzba suggests we should, gardens become the places where life's many hungers are met, where "people begin to see, smell, hear, touch, and taste the breadth and depth of human membership and responsibility" (2011, xvi).

Key Terms

I use the term "homesteader" to describe individuals and families who produce at least some of what they consume at home, and who cultivate a cash crop to meet the rest of their monetary needs. "Homestead" describes the space in which they do this. I use the term "cash crop," in turn, to refer not only to traditional crops like tobacco or cotton or vegetables for market, but also to businesses based at home, like Hollis's tinctured herbs, or to businesses that use the homestead to make money, as in the case of consultants who manage a "bed no breakfast." These twenty-first century cash crops mark my consultants as

entrepreneurial, a difference that I distinguish by qualifying the term “homestead” with “contemporary.”

At times I break the homestead down into two basic elements, using “home” to refer to the house in which homesteaders live, and “garden” or “farm” to indicate the cultivated productive land that surrounds the home. Here “garden” marks smaller spaces that are cultivated primarily for aesthetics, and “farm” references larger spaces of one to several acres that privilege food production, though most often I use “garden” or “farm” in alignment with my consultants’ word choices for their spaces.

Two other terms that I use in this thesis also call for clarification: I use “homeplace” to refer to house or homestead, but in a way that highlights the emotional and psychological elements of these spaces; and I use “landscape” to refer to the interaction of people and place (Groth 1997), with occasional focus on the homestead, but more often in reference to the larger spaces in which homesteads are situated. Considerations of the landscapes in which contemporary homesteads are embedded evoke a parallel between this movement and the earliest American homesteaders who pushed the nation across the continent; both groups establish homesteads where they did not exist before, and both must contend with outside pressures and opportunities that define the success or failure of their endeavours (though, of course, the external forces between the two homesteading eras are wildly different).

Methodology

The ethnographic fieldwork for this project spanned six months. I worked with five families across the Carolinas that choose to homestead today. Focusing on three regions—the Piedmont and western areas of North Carolina and Charleston, South Carolina—I endeavored to participate in my consultants’ daily routines as much as possible. I visited them in their homes and joined them on tours of their farms and gardens. With the premise

that shared labor offers a unique opportunity for conversation, I always offered assistance with whatever work needed doing. Most of my consultants accepted the offers for help; many of the stories included in this thesis were shared as we hayed potatoes and pulled weeds, changed bed linens and fluffed pillows, dug retaining walls and grubbed tree roots.

My fieldwork yielded extensive field notes, recorded formal interviews and informal conversations, and photographs of their homes and gardens. I visited almost all of the consultants three or more times, spending at least a morning or afternoon with them on each visit. At one of the homesteads, I stayed on-site in an open-air yurt for a week; I spent an additional several weeks with another consultant at an off-site job. Both experiences offered invaluable additional insight into these consultants' ways of thinking and living. With each visit, I attended to the narratives and stories, styles of work, and details of home and garden as contexts for interpreting my consultants' commentary.

I willingly jumped into whatever was happening during my visits, which made for a diverse collection of interesting experiences. In the name of fieldwork, I received a tarot card reading, wild-crafted medicinal oils, travelled across the Chatham County countryside in a mobile office minivan, mixed mud with my feet, designed chicken coop modifications, and helped skin and butcher a racoon. I forwent showering for a week, drank tea from fine English china, and taught an on-the-fly adobe-building workshop. I ate unnamed wild greens cooked on a 20th century wood stove and gluten-free blueberry waffles on an exquisite Charleston porch. I had fun.

On Group

But at times I worried that in gathering these consultants together as 'homesteaders,' I was forcing them into a category that they wouldn't recognize. I come to this question of 'group' with an eye towards Dorothy Noyes's chapter in *Eight Words for the Study of*

Expressive Culture, where she notes that “ideas about group are the most powerful and the most dangerous in folklore studies” (2003, 7). In some ways, my consultants proved the truth of this statement, particularly given that most of them do not consider themselves homesteaders. Yet they are all excited to talk about their homes and gardens. They do not live in the same area, but unfurl across the arguably distinct region of the Carolinas. They have never met one another, and each makes her/his living in very different ways, yet they all fit into my loose definition of a “homesteader” as someone who produces at least some of what they consume at home *and* maintains a home-based “cash crop.”

Working ethnographically, Noyes says, we encounter the fragility of the concept of “group” and the impossibility of neat definitions. After journeying through a number of theories and theorists in her chapter, Noyes concludes that *community* is a product of the social imagination. I still find the *group* of my project problematic, particularly given Noyes’s insistence that individual acts of identification create the reality of social categories; at the same time, however, I rest more easily in her allowance that community exists as the project of a network. My consultants do clearly move among a network, a point underscored by the shared matrix of their favorite resources and thinkers.

A deep and wide-ranging intertextuality within the world of homesteading cements my consultants together as a group. The ideas, thinkers, and resources that travel among them and transcend the regional and socio-economic differences between them draw homesteaders into conversation with one another. I am taken by the breadth of shared “texts” implied by the application of the term intertextuality to this world. Not surprisingly, figureheads of the contemporary homesteading movement are familiar guideposts among my consultants. Will Allen of Growing Power—the famous basketball-star turned inner-city farmer in Milwaukee,

Wisconsin—serves as a shared reference point, as do Helen and Scott Nearing, whose Maine homestead of seven decades positioned them as the grandparents of the homesteading movement (Nearing and Nearing 1989). Beyond these leaders are a set of thinkers whose writings appear on the library shelves of countless contemporary homesteaders, articulating the philosophies of homesteading and offering nuts-and-bolts instructions for a do-it-yourself lifestyle.

The intertextuality of this group walks off the bookshelves and into the garden as well. From design of the garden to varieties of blueberry bushes to lamentations about the loss of honey bees, homesteaders dwell in shared landscapes of conversation. Four of my five consultants, for instance, keep bees, and each of them recounted a story of severe die-off in their hives during the fall and winter of 2012. Each family narrated a connection to our nation-wide epidemic of colony collapse with fervent resolution to mitigate the issue on a small-scale; their nearly identical stories reminded me of a lecture I attended at the annual Organic Growers School, a conference of small-scale farmers and gardeners from across the Carolinas, in which Kathleen Lamont, a long-time homesteader and writer, became so emotional when describing bee deaths in conjunction with monoculture agriculture that she started crying mid-presentation (Lamont 2013). The resolution to support healthy bees among the homesteading network, in addition to the bee-keeping classes and mentors (informally called “bee buddies” by my consultants), is but one of the threads that ties this group and their landscapes together.

Like the shared presence of honey, intertextuality comes in from the field and onto the dinner plates of contemporary homesteaders. All participate in seed saving and exchange in one form or another, with the seeds and the stories they carry becoming texts that travel

between the gardens, kitchen tables, and bodies of homesteaders, finalizing with physicality a network that begins as a conversation.²

No network, of course, comes without boundaries. For this network of homesteaders, some of the most salient of these boundaries are hidden. It is essential to note, for instance, that this group of contemporary homesteaders is both white and middle-class. My consultants all come from backgrounds of privilege; all of them are in a position to engage with this movement because they can own land, and--perhaps of equal importance--because they can *think about* owning land. Both are necessary precursors to contemporary homesteading as I have described it. This is not to say that landless people, and those not in a position to even *conceptualize* land ownership, are not engaging in this movement; they certainly are. But their engagement necessarily looks different.³ As such, the intertextuality discussed here is admittedly narrow, though it nonetheless joins the five consultants of this thesis together in a group.

² The excellent work of scholar Fiona McAnally, plant and social scientist, explores the intricacies of swapping seeds and their stories, and investigates networks created by heirloom vegetables in the mountain South (2013).

³ The motivations, inspirations, ideologies, and narratives of other “groups” of contemporary homesteaders, some of them landless and some of them members of other cultural communities, would be a fascinating launching point for additional research.

Chapter 2: An Enduring Dream

The homesteading movement is, as I have said, not a new trend (thus my “contemporary” demarcation); much of the intertextuality that I have introduced also features a temporal element that engages my consultants in intellectual and embodied conversation with the generations who have come before them. Historian Dona Brown posits that the phenomenon of homestead as both art and commentary emerged in the late 19th century with the first generation of back-to-the-land texts (2011, 3). Then, like now, people came to the movement with a variety of ideological backgrounds, with proponents ranging from anarchists, socialists, and progressives to enthusiasts of the Arts and Crafts Movement and advocates of the simple life; all were stepping forward for a slice of the good life pie. Then, like now, going back to the land in response to a shared set of pressing social and economic concerns is what united this collection of folks. And then, like now, adherents of the dream recognized that real change depended on a fundamental realignment of power, leading them to look to land as a private remedy in the interim (or in lieu of realigned power structures, which never materialized in the ways that they imagined them).

Brown’s exemplary text, *Back to the Land: The Enduring Dream of Self-Sufficiency in Modern America*, posits four waves of the homesteading movement. The first wave began in the late 1800s and peaked just before World War I; it was populated by middle-rank workers motivated by “producerist” values who envisioned a return to the land as a means of preserving artisanal skill, personal autonomy, and household self-sufficiency in the face of

the growing trends of mechanization, monopoly, and consumerism (Brown 2011, 5). But this generation of homesteaders, a generation that was quite close to a time when most of America lived on the land, knew that the land itself would not solve the ills they hoped to mitigate. This first wave, marked by the radical and progressive political climate in the years before the First World War, maintained a forward-facing orientation. (Brown 2011, 5–6).

The movement's second wave, undergirded by a new post-Depression political climate, began with the New Deal and continued through the Second World War. It was during this wave that the term "homestead" was first widely applied to the movement, often in place of the phrase "back to the land," which many considered overly romantic. Ralph Borsodi is credited with popularizing the term, which was also employed by New Deal advocates, who used "subsistence homesteads" to describe their projects (Borsodi 1929; Brown 2011, 6–7). New Deal programs envisioned the homeplace as the locale in which to address the list of social problems that forward-looking progressives had advocated addressing for years: remedying slum tenements, bettering the conditions of farm tenancy, and easing the assimilation of immigrants (Brown 2011, 141–171). As Brown articulates, "although it may seem natural today to assume that the idea of going back to the land was rooted in nostalgia, many early back-to-the-landers would have found that notion absurd. They were fond of arguing that their movement led not 'back' but 'forward' to the land—'forward to better things than man has ever known in the past,'" imagining a rural future made easier by technological advances (Smythe 1921, 56, in Brown 2011, 6).

This wave witnessed a splintering of interests, with at least one faction using the movement to argue for the decentralization of America. This is where the southern Agrarians fit into the picture; they posed the self-sufficient farm and an American regional identity as

counterweights to the centralizing tendencies of both government and business (Brown 2011, 7). This faction of back-to-the-landers was the first to orient their call to action in the past, turning against an uncritical faith in progress. They argued that

it was precisely the continued adherence to “backward” self-sufficiency that had kept some farmers solvent while others had been forced off their land. “Mightn’t this wholesale misery”—dispossessed tenants, farm bankruptcies, even the Dust Bowl—“have been averted by decommercialized, more self-sufficient agriculture?” They concluded defiantly: “We prefer the ‘backward’ method.” (Agar, Borsodi, and Fowler 1939, 9, in Brown 2011, 7).

This decentralist, regionalist, and sometimes nostalgic wing of the movement did not disappear after World War II, giving rise, in part, to a third wave of back-to-the-landers, who added a growing list of environmental concerns to the ills that the homestead might mitigate. In the 1970s, this new generation of homesteaders once again embraced the vision of self-sufficiency, this time invoking the decentralizing ethic with what Brown labels “unabashed” nostalgia. Hence John Shuttleworth, the founder of *Mother Earth News*, in 1970 celebrated a time when “people still controlled their food supplies and their housing and their transportation and their work and their entertainment and all the other aspects of their lives on a very direct and personal basis” (cited in Brown 2011, 8).

The fourth and current wave of homesteading, according to Brown, encompasses the economic recession of 2008, though it began before then as cultural critics from the left and the right began “voicing discomfort with the greed, the luxury, and the debt they feared were becoming characteristic of fin de siècle culture” (Brown 2011, 16). Though she does not profile this most recent iteration of the movement, she references it in the introduction to her text, leaving it open for scholarly attention and analysis. This is the invitation that I have taken up. The wave that we are now riding, which my fieldwork endeavors to illuminate, is

the first to include urban and suburban landscapes; one of the movement's defining features is that physical relocation is no longer a necessary precursor to going "back to the land."

What ties the movement's four waves together, maintains Brown, is a list of social, economic, and environmental concerns—financial panics, cyclical crashes, depressions, pollution, scarcity, and an overcrowded planet—that are mediated by the act of homesteading, a list reinforced by the stories contemporary homesteaders tell.

It's worth noting that the back-to-the-land trend is not the only movement that has used home as a place to mediate the ills of America. Social critic bell hooks writes about how homes in the segregated South were the places where African Americans could affirm one another and heal the wounds inflicted by white power; as such, she speaks of the homeplace as a "site of resistance" (2007, 68). Of course, the spaces of back-to-the-landers are different, but hooks's perspective nonetheless reminds us of the power of home in mitigating outside pressures: houses are "places where all that truly matter[s] in life [takes] place—the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls There we learn integrity of being" (hooks 2007, 68). I take hooks's use of "homeplace" to signify the emotional and psychological aspects of a homestead; it functions as a place to voice and embody a critique, just as it did and does for back-to-the-landers, and to restore the envisioned integrity of being.

Brown's introduction of the role of nostalgia in this on-going movement necessitates closer attention. Folklorist Ray Cashman takes up nostalgia, a term mired in negative connotations, and rethinks it; in so doing, he joins a trend to reevaluate nostalgia after the term has, for centuries, invoked pathologic and aberrant connotations. The invocation is grounded in its roots, the Greek terms *nostros*, "to return home," and *algos*, a painful condition; a

Swiss physician first brought these terms together in 1688 to describe a potentially fatal form of homesickness (Smith 2000). Cashman writes about the role nostalgia plays in the Northern Irish community where he works, defining nostalgia as “a cultural practice that enables people to generate meaning in the present through selective visions of the past” (2006, 138). He suggests that nostalgia can be used critically in two ways: for instantiating informed evaluation of the present through contrast with the past, and for inspiring action of great moral weight—action that may effect a better future (2006, 137–138). Both ideas are relevant to the contemporary homesteading movement; both appeared in conversations with my consultants. Hollis, for example, turns to the Appalachian people that previously inhabited his land and produced all that they needed on site, using nostalgia critically in the first sense that Cashman suggests—to evaluate the present by contrasting it with this past. Tom Grizzle, a consultant I will introduce in the following chapter, illustrates Cashman’s second critical use. Responding to social critic James Howard Kunstler’s nostalgic claim that “We once were that kind of people [that were] brave, clear-eyed, resourceful, resolute, competent and confident” (2012, 245), Grizzle builds a lifestyle that positions him as brave, clear-eyed, resourceful, resolute, competent and confident. In so doing, he uses nostalgia to effect a better future.

Brown argues that the back-to-the-land movement looked forward for information and inspiration as it began, and then later backward for the same motivating forces. I have drawn on Cashman to set the nostalgia that came to characterize the movement in a positive light, an essential orientation as I argue that today’s iteration of the movement turns in both directions at once. Forward-looking visions and backward-looking nostalgia inform the contemporary homestead. This concurrent turning in two directions unveils a middle space,

the present, which inevitably becomes a messy playground as the allures of past and future confront the realities of life in 21st century America. Contemporary homesteaders constantly position and reposition the elements of their lives along an imaginary see-saw, always seeking balance between an imagined past and an envisioned future. With an eye towards demonstrating how this interplay between vision and nostalgia unfolds in the present-day messiness of contemporary homesteads, I will now profile each of my five consultants.

Chapter 3: The Contemporary Homesteader: Portraits

Tom Grizzle

Tom Grizzle was born and raised in Chapel Hill, N.C., as a “UNC brat”—his father was a professor at the university (Grizzle 2013b). He attributes his first serious thinking about climate change and living responsibly to the classes he took in college in the 1970s, and particularly to an ecology class that raised the issue of global warming: “We talked about the greenhouse effect and how it was coming down the pipe [and how] we were going to have to deal with it at some point. That made an impact on me” (Grizzle 2013b). Grizzle describes himself as a “doom and gloomer,” his worldview focused on the deeply troubling potentials of global financial collapse and climate shifts.

These potentials have become an organizing principle of Grizzle’s adult life. As he began a career working in the Research Triangle Park, Grizzle and six friends purchased 150 acres in Person County, N.C., in 1990 and started an intentional community. They called it Potluck Community Farm, and Grizzle built a house and garden there, doing most of the labor himself. The community, located about 20 miles north of Durham on an old tobacco farm, has all the trappings of a proper intentional community: pond, orchard, food and flower gardens, barnyard animals, nearly 100 acres of undisturbed forest with walking trails, consensus decision-making, and challenging interpersonal politics (Anon. 2011; Grizzle 2013b). Grizzle never lived in the community, but instead lived in Chapel Hill, from whence he commuted to the Research Triangle Park during the week and to the Farm on weekends,

with the intention of moving there one day (Grizzle 2013c). Eventually the realities of children, divorce, remarriage, and aging parents, coupled with the stress of commuting across the Triangle and the difficulties of consensus decision-making, pushed Grizzle and his wife, Carrie Ann, to sell their stake in the community and invest fully in their life in Chapel Hill.



Figure 1: Contemporary homesteader Tom Grizzle in the front yard of his suburban Chapel Hill, N.C. home. The box on his front porch is used to stage logs for the wood-burning stove that heats his home; the rain barrel at right collects runoff from the roof which Grizzle uses to water the persimmon and cherry trees near the street.

Full investment, in Grizzle’s terms, meant clearing the forested backyard of his family’s suburban ranch house to the tune of \$10,000 to install a “nano-farm.” Inspired by his work with nano-particles, Grizzle uses the term “nano-farm” to represent the scale of his garden, which ranges across the half-acre property and adheres to the grammar of homesteading. He tends a vegetable garden, fruit trees and berry bushes, egg-laying hens, bees, and chickens and rabbits for food. There are compost piles, stacks of delivered hay,

fermenting barrels of compost “tea,” a solar-powered well with a back-up hand pump, a water storage cistern, and lines for drying clothes. A tiny barn houses tools, a woodstove, a deep freezer, and stations to kill and process the chickens and rabbits.



Figure 2: The interior of Grizzle’s nano-sized barn. Here, potatoes are curing after a recent harvest. The woodstove serves as a backup heat source and a deep freezer, just outside of the image frame, is filled with hunted deer and last season’s tomato harvest. Grizzle’s bee-keeping equipment and tools hang on the walls, necessities as Grizzle invests in “reskilling” himself and his family.

Grizzle supports the nano-farm and his family with a toxicology consulting business that he runs from a home-office that overlooks the backyard, a business which he started, in part, to eliminate his daily commute to RTP. His days are a dance between the business and the backyard.

Grizzle calls himself a “doomer” (2013a; 2013b), a label that describes his assertion that the collapse of our industrialized culture and economy is imminent. In an attempt to articulate the past that Grizzle and other doomers like him imagine when they critique the

current state of affairs, I go back to James Howard Kunstler, who is one of Grizzle's favorite thinkers and authors: "We once were that kind of people . . . people who [could] understand the signals of reality and act intelligently in response . . ." (Kunstler 2012, 245). But that's not the kind of people Grizzle sees today: "I'm looking around and thinking, 'Gosh. Nobody else sees the doom coming. What's up with that!?' I have that feeling a lot. I go out, just a mile up the street to 15-501 [Chapel Hill's bypass] and its all hustle and bustle and SUVs galore. Nobody seems to get it" (2013b). Grizzle shares Kunstler's nostalgia for an earlier day; the line from Kunstler comes from the coda to his book, *Too Much Magic: Wishful Thinking, Technology, and the Fate of the Nation*, a text that places his worldview—and Grizzle's—"in a society that is crumbling under the weight of its investments in technology and tortured by the unintended consequences and diminishing returns of these investments" (2012, 244). As Grizzle says, "Some people think we can just keep growing and growing indefinitely—economic growth forever and ever. I think that's just la-la land" (2013b).

"So what can we do about this?" Grizzle continues, "To me, the most urgent thing is to try to create yourself a source of food" (2013b). The future Grizzle envisions is one where the "terms for daily life change sharply" (2013b), one where the hand pump on his well will be one of the greatest resources in his neighborhood. Note that while Grizzle's future is marked by collapse, it also includes a hopeful element of rebirth, of a new daily reality. The nano-farm is in service of this vision, a place that provides food in the present moment, but more importantly offers a space for "reskilling" in the arts of self-sufficiency (Pargman 2010). And if the collapse never happens? "If I die an old man here and everything is fine, I've had a fun ride anyway," Grizzle says, "That's the way I look at it. . . . At least I'm getting food [and] benefiting my health" (2013b).

Teresa Farson

Teresa Farson, a native North Carolinian who grew up in Charlotte, lives in downtown Davidson, N.C., with her husband Jack. Though Farson shies away from calling herself a homesteader because she is not producing much food at home, I include her in the project because her do-it-yourself ethic contradicts her insistence that her home and garden are not worthy of attention: she designed and managed the construction of their home, home-schooled her four children, and has co-owned a gift shop in downtown Charlotte with her sister for more than two decades.



Figure 3: Teresa Farson weeds a bed of lettuce and kale beside her home in historic neighborhood in Davidson, N.C. Farson considers her keen eye for beautiful aesthetics a gift from God; she told me that the stacked stone walls that augment her garden are a lovely but expensive addition, a luxury not available to most homesteaders but made possible by her husband's full-time professional work (Farson 2013b).

A deep Christian faith informs Farson's life and work; she invoked the motivating power of God in our conversations about almost everything, from gardening, to schooling, to

next steps. Farson sees making beauty available to others as her gift and her service; a calming, cultivated, *Southern Living*-esque aesthetic penetrates her home, garden, and gift shop. “I feel like there are qualities of God that He puts in each one of us,” she says, “and I feel like I got the piece of Him that wants to create beauty . . . I want to create something beautiful out of what is there.” She talks about the satisfaction she takes in providing beautiful spaces for others:

People come into the store and they don’t buy anything. You can tell that they’re taking a deep breath . . . and they’ll say, “This is my therapy. I come to your store and I take a deep breath and I look at the beauty and I relax.” It’s the same thing as the people looking at my garden. . . . I love the fact that other people are seeing the beauty and enjoying it. It brings me pleasure, and it’s a small pleasure, but in this world we need . . . the simple beauty of thinking, “Wow, this . . . is pretty!” (2013b)

Here Farson begins to articulate what is wrong with the world in its present state, though she doesn’t dwell on this while telling her story; instead, she focuses on how manifesting God’s beauty is both her work and her reward. Farson’s critique of our culture is not narrated aloud, as it is for some of the consultants; but it is nonetheless implicit in her imaginings about the past and visioning of the future.

The past that informs Farson’s thinking is a 20th century Appalachian one. “I was thinking about it this morning while I was out weeding,” she told me, “and I asked myself, ‘what . . . made me want to [homestead]?’” She named her great aunt, who lived on a farm in the mountains of Virginia (the same farm where Farson’s mother grew up), as a primary motivation: “they had a ‘farm’ farm It was beautiful; it was an old homeplace with the original outdoor kitchen. It was in the valley surrounded by gorgeous mountains.” Memories in the field and in the kitchen with her great aunt serve as the target of Farson’s nostalgia: “I delighted in going with my aunt to get the eggs, trying to milk the cow, picking apples in the morning. We’d get up so early and make homemade butter. She would make biscuits in the

wood stove.” A reverence for this past is underscored by the details of the stove: “[My aunt] had an electric oven but she said, ‘it doesn’t make biscuits the same!’ So she would stoke up the [wood] stove and make biscuits and I would say, ‘Aunt Mabel, these are the best biscuits in the world!’” (2013b)

As a child, Farson cemented this 20th century past in her imagination by watching *Little House on the Prairie* and *The Waltons* (a television series set in the Virginia mountains), and applying what she learned in her own backyard: “There was a little slope behind my house and . . . I would find ferns and violets around the neighborhood and I would plant them [on the slope] and make a garden” (Farson 2013b). An impressive continuity to this imagined mountain past ties together Farson’s story: “And then I went to college at Appalachian,” she says, “and I took a homesteading course. . . . We worked in the gardens, we castrated sheep, we felled trees, we made sausage. All those kind of things.” (Farson 2013b)

And the future Farson envisions? She doesn’t explicitly articulate a picture of a self-sustaining, ecologically sensitive existence, but instead grounds her future in faith, and in a life that exemplifies living in God’s graces. “Our goals . . . [are] to love each other, to love the family, to love other people beyond the family, to love God, and to love learning” (2013b). She said this to me while explaining her motivation for home-schooling her children, but I think it succinctly captures Farson’s gentle vision for the future—her children’s futures, her own future, and the future of her community and country, a future which she envisions as ideologically robust rather than explicitly economically or politically focused.

Nancy Paz-Wisniewski

Nancy Paz-Wisniewski is a homesteader in transition. A resident of North Carolina because of the career opportunities afforded by the Research Triangle Park, Nancy has lived with her husband and daughter in Raleigh as a successful science consultant for many years. Paz-Wisniewski owned a consulting firm that served a set of larger vaccine-related companies. Her father's death three years ago prompted her to shift her focus away from money and toward "something that matters"; for Paz-Wisniewski, pursuing her long-time dream of being a farmer "matters" (2013a).

Insistent that she start small in the event that the actualities of farming might not matter as much to Paz-Wisniewski as she dreamed they did, her husband pushed her to start farming in the backyard of their suburban North Raleigh home. She pursued the backyard project with zeal, installing all the elements of a larger farm in miniature, quickly re-writing her landscape to adhere to the grammatical terms of homesteading. Vegetable beds, berry bushes and fruit trees, hops vines and ginger root plants, compost bins, egg-laying hens, bees, and an aquaponics system now populate the yard. She undertakes each of these elements of her homestead with the exacting precision of a scientist, laughing about her approach as she explained the complex configuration of siphons and drains on her aquaponics system: "It's like a fish tank," she told me, "you've got to keep it oxygenated and the balance has to be right." "Wow," I responded, "so . . . technical." "Yes," replied Paz-Wisniewski, "and that's what I like; that's my background. I come from a really technical background and that's what drew me to the aquaponics. I still got to work with the hype [of technical details]" (2013a).



Figure 4: Farmer Nancy Paz-Wisniewski pictured here as she narrates the inner workings of the aquaponics system she constructed in her suburban backyard in north Raleigh, N.C. The system, which proved to be a significant investment of time and money, produced tilapia and prolific vegetables (fertilized by the fish excrement) in all four seasons before Paz-Wisniewski disassembled the system in anticipation of relocating it to her new Chatham County farm.

Convinced that she could be successful at farming, Paz-Wisniewski scaled up. She leased rows for growing vegetables and a number of blueberry bushes at Ayreshire Farm, the Triangle's best incubator farm and home of the beloved, but now-deceased, Bill Dow, founder of the Carrboro Farmer's Market. Paz-Wisniewski started selling her produce at the North Hills Farmers' Market in Raleigh, reaching into the realms of sales and customer service as she tried full-time farming on for size.

Meanwhile, Paz-Wisniewski continued to explore the options to fully realize her dream, a contemporary homestead with a small-scale market garden as the cash crop. I first met her in 2011 during conversations about farming for Raleigh City Farm, an urban educational farm in downtown Raleigh. She also, after Bill Dow's death, considered

purchasing Ayreshire Farm. But neither alternative was the right fit for Paz-Wisniewski, and she ultimately settled on the purchase of four forested acres adjacent to the new Briar Chapel development in northern Chatham County. Once a classic Carolina Piedmont tobacco farm, the land had sat fallow for the last fifteen years; Paz-Wisniewski is now working to clear the land, oversee the construction of a house for her family, and establish a two-acre market garden.

The past that underwrites Paz-Wisniewski's motivations is not as explicit as that of many other contemporary homesteaders, though it appears wrapped into a single word on the drawings for her newly purchased land. A set of renderings for the property, which farm designer Tony Kleese drafted for Paz-Wisniewski to help finalize the arrangement of the elements on the land, labels the home that Paz-Wisniewski will build as a "cottage." This label evokes a European tradition of a small dwelling accompanied by gardens and pens for animals; the term is linked in the popular mind to *stead*, "that complex of structure and space remembered now in English words like *homestead* and *farmstead*," writes one scholar of landscapes (Stilgoe 1982, 14). A clear connection with this past, captured in her admiration for the small-scale farming traditions of pre-industrial Europe, surfaced several times in our conversations. It was particularly evident in Paz-Wisniewski's deep respect for Dow, whose Ayrshire Farm is named for the town in the British Isles where he traced his family roots, and for the ecological conservation practices that accompanied his *stead*. Old world Europe arose again during my time with Paz-Wisniewski while we were discussing hand-harvesting grain with a scythe: "Have you ever been to the bio-intensive [farming] website?" she asked me. "It's very interesting. Very cool . . . There's a lot that I learned just by watching [a series of videos on how to farm bio-intensively]. They grow a lot of wheat . . . and they do it with a

scythe, and it's very interesting" (Paz-Wisniewski 2013b). These brief references pin an imagined past to an age of property stewardship in Europe that demanded that land be farmed bio-intensively, a tradition Paz-Wisniewski admires as she constructs her own *stead*. A house, a well, a garden, and small livestock are all part of her plans.

And the future that captures Paz-Wisniewski's imagination? "I want to make it more meaningful," she says (2013a). Her critique of the now rests in her explanation of why she left life as a consultant: "It is all about money, and I don't want to make it all about money" (2013a). During a morning together several months before she said those words to me, we happened upon a fawn nestled between two boulders in the tall grass of her recently purchased land in Chatham County. Both Paz-Wisniewski and I had squealed with excitement, admired the baby deer in hushed tones, and taken blurry photos of it with our phones. "Hi," she had said to the deer, "you'll be our little deer on Paz Farm?" And to me she said, "Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh, I can't believe it. What a gift this morning. What a gift. Oh my god, my daughter would love to be here right now. She'd be dying [with delight]" (2013b).

This encounter with the fawn, and the absolute reverence with which Paz-Wisniewski spoke to the baby deer, sets in relief her critique of our money-driven society. Enchanting moments like that one, "gifts" as she labelled them, should be a regular part of our days. And family should as well—Paz-Wisniewski's desire for her daughter to see the baby captures her belief in the importance of living and working together with family. Paz-Wisniewski's sister and her family live in Briar Chapel, and the two siblings recently orchestrated moving their elderly mother into their community as well. I asked if Paz-Wisniewski if she and her family

had been “plotting” this convergence, or if it happened serendipitously. Her response captures well her determination and stark ability to execute a vision:

Well, I’ve always been plotting [*she laughs as she answers my question*]. They just didn’t know I was pulling this all together. . . . I would talk about it and I’d say, “Hey! There’s this land [for sale] and it’s right next to this community, and wouldn’t [being neighbors] be great!” I would always keep putting the seeds in their minds; I’d say, “I’m really fighting for this and you should do this.” And so then my sister said, “Yeah, this would be cool.” My sister is going to partner with me on farming. She [agreed]: “Yeah, let’s move.” So she moved from Atlanta to here [Briar Chapel] and this was just last August. And then my mom was getting up in age — she’s 86— and she [was] alone in Florida and so we said, “You’ve got to come where family is” So it just kind of fell into place. We kind of knew that we wanted to back together again because we were spread all over, and we just kind of got pulled together. (Paz-Wisniewski 2013b)

The name of Paz-Wisniewski’s project, Paz Farm, grows out of her vision. Fortuitously, Paz is the first portion of Paz-Wisniewski’s maiden name, rendering “peace” a word and idea that evokes father and family for her. “Peace!” she said in response to my translation of Paz Farm, “I love the word ‘peace.’ Everything I have has the word ‘peace’ on it” (Paz-Wisniewski 2013b). Concretizing this more meaningful and more peaceful future puts Paz-Wisniewski in conversation with other contemporary homesteaders; her goals of rebalancing profit motives while caring for our human and environmental communities and living closer to family—in every sense of the word “closer”—echo those of every consultant I worked with.

Joe Hollis

Joe Hollis, whose story introduces this thesis, is in his early seventies and forges ahead with the rural mountain homestead he calls Mountain Gardens, which he established over forty years ago outside of Burnsville, N.C. The son of an English professor whose career settled at UNC-Chapel Hill, Hollis moved to North Carolina with his family from Michigan via Washington, D.C., while he was still in high school. Taken by the simplicity

and beauty of rural peasant lifestyles while living abroad in Borneo as a Peace Corps volunteer, Hollis developed the philosophy he calls “paradise gardening” that guides his life and work: “From the very beginning of Mountain Gardens, my goal has been to develop, demonstrate and promote a radical[ly] alternative way of living on earth; over time I have only become more convinced of the importance and urgency of this work” (Hollis 2009). Hollis experimented briefly with living in other communities before purchasing the four acres of Mountain Gardens, a location uniquely positioned at the edge of Pisgah National Forest and only two miles from one of the oldest intentional communities in the South, the town of Celo, which was established by Quakers in the 1930s.



Figure 5: Joe Hollis tends to young wasabi plants, a species he has established as a particularly lucrative cash crop on his Burnsville, N.C. homestead. Hollis teaches wasabi-growing workshops, sells starts and the plant’s seeds, and markets the leaves from mature plants to high-end restaurants in Asheville eager to serve now-trendy wild food.

In the early years of his project, Hollis endeavored to replicate a traditional Appalachian homestead, drawing heavily from the popular *Foxfire* back-to-the-land writing of the 1970s (Wigginton 1972; Wigginton 1973; Wigginton 1975). From the “early years” to now, Hollis, an intellectual and self-taught horticulturalist, has approached his homestead as a laboratory: “I have assembled an extensive collection of resources (books, tools, apparatus, plants) which, combined with [my] situation (adjacent to the National Forest, at the foot of the tallest mountains in eastern [North] America) make Mountain Gardens a unique laboratory to develop a truly sustainable way of living” (Hollis 2013a). Hollis spends mountain winters studying a diverse range of topics and his sparse home boasts an immense library.

As the needs of his immediate family shifted and his ability to house additional residents expanded, Hollis began taking on tenants at Mountain Gardens, first in a work-trade capacity and now in a more formal apprenticeship relationship. “If your idea of a good time (the best time),” writes Hollis in a call to potential apprentices in 2009, “is to integrate your mind, body and spirit in the company of like minds, I invite you to join us” (Hollis 2013a). At present, six to ten apprentices live on the homestead with Hollis at any given time. My interactions with the current apprentices greatly shaped the week I spent at Mountain Gardens last summer; they introduced me to the basics of living on-site, answering my questions about how to light the wood-burning cook stove, how to identify the edible plants in the gardens, and how to utilize the composting toilet.



Figure 6: An apprentice prepares bread for the group of people living at Mountain Gardens. The outdoor kitchen, well-stocked with condiments to augment produce from the garden, functions with a wood-burning stove and cold water piped from an adjacent stream; water is boiled for dishwashing and there is no working refrigerator.

Hollis's cash crops have varied over the decades. In the early years, he maintained a landscaping business and later did commercial bookkeeping; those morphed into farming a series of cash crops, which then gave birth to a host of other revenue-producing activities, from hosting the wasabi-growing workshops and making medicinal tinctures to selling seeds and plant starts to hosting students from NCSU's horticulture program. A dozen more potential revenue streams are at play in Hollis's thinking, from developing wild food recipes to crafting Chinese longevity tonics (2013d).

Hollis's grounding in the past is very different in some ways from the other consultants. As one of his best friends says, "Hollis's nostalgia is Borneo" (Hooker 2013), referencing Hollis's years as a Peace Corps volunteer. Hollis's years abroad sowed the seeds

that grew into his guiding philosophy; when I asked him about the aesthetic he holds in mind for his own garden, he answered by describing the “dooryard” gardens that characterized rural life across Borneo and the tropics, drawing on nostalgic remembrances, as Cashman suggested, to inform his present by contrasting it with the past:

Dooryard gardens [exist] mostly in the tropics. The general system is that people have a piece of land where they grow their staple crop—rice, corn, whatever it is—and then everything else is in this dooryard garden: vegetables, fruit, stuff for craft work, medicinal herbs, cooking herbs, all growing around the house kind of in a random, unstructured way, with maybe some chickens running around and maybe a little fish pond and maybe a pig under the latrine. It's totally incorporated . . . [and] it's just right around your house. And then maybe some distance away is your “farm” which is basically just your starch—yams or whatever it is. I think that’s a really good model. (2013d)

In addition to his experiences abroad, Hollis points to several other pasts that motivate his work. “The things that influenced me most at the beginning,” he says, were “studies of hunter-gatherers, . . . [and] the differences between hunter-gatherer societies and agricultural societies” (2013d). Very academic in his approach, Hollis cites Paul Shepard, Marshall Salens, and Stanley Diamond as the anthropologists who have most strongly shaped his thinking. But also, as I have said, Hollis worked from the *Foxfire* series, positioning his imagined past in a more popular understanding of Appalachia and in parallel with several of the other consultants profiled here. “And then,” he continues, “I'm hugely influenced by Taoist philosophy; that's my main philosophy in life.” Hollis’s orientation to this ancient Chinese philosophy is augmented by his now immense knowledge of Chinese medicine, useful Chinese plants, and the designs of Chinese scholar gardens. He says, “Taoism is really *the* philosophy if you wanted to invent a sustainable world” (2013d).

Hollis’s notion of “inventing” a sustainable world carries us into his envisioned future. Paradise gardening, as Hollis articulates it across his website and to visitors to

Mountain Gardens (2013e), captures the decades of deep thinking about, and careful consideration of, what could be, and should be, possible. “The problem,” writes Hollis, is

to find a way to live on earth which promotes our health and happiness / is conducive to the full development of our innate potential, and at the same time is “democratic”, that is, available to us all / not using more than our share, and harmonious with the biosphere’s evident drive toward increasing diversity, complexity, stability. . . . Walk away from it. It is time, indeed time is running out, to abandon the entire edifice of civilization / the State / the Economy and walk (don’t run!) to a better place: home, to Paradise. Paradise is, first of all, a garden. A garden in which everything we need is there for the taking. (Hollis 1990)

The carefully considered immediacy that reveals itself in Hollis’s writing motivates him to push beyond his introverted nature in service of the vision. “If I didn’t think the world was in a hell of a mess,” he told me during an interview, “I would just be making my garden. I would not be spending my time on a lot of outreach” (2013d). Like Grizzle, Hollis is a proselytizer, who sees his homesteading mission as more than simply finding a sustainable place in the world.

Hawk and Ayal Hurst

Hawk and Ayal Hurst are a couple who live in Charleston, South Carolina. Hawk is a naturalist, professional environmental educator, and flute-maker, and Ayal is an artist and healer.⁴ Their “bed no breakfast” in downtown Charleston provides a significant source of stability and income.

⁴ I refer to Hawk and Ayal by their first names, rather than their shared last name Hurst, to easily distinguish between the two as consultants.

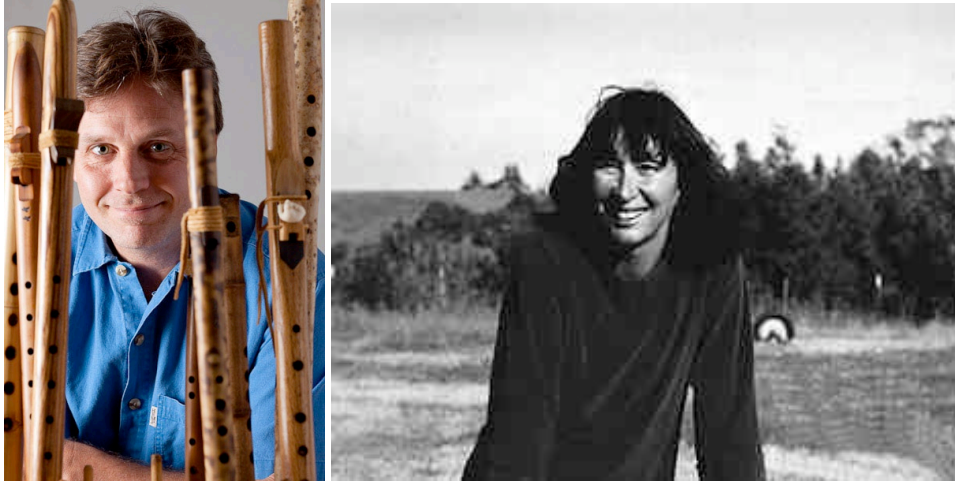


Figure 7: Hawk and Ayal Hurst. Images are taken from their respective websites; Hawk's website profiles his storytelling services, flute-making art, and children's book writing and Ayal's details the spirituality and healing services she offers, each of these elements of their work comprises a cash crop that helps support their homestead (H. Hurst n.d.; A. Hurst n.d.).

I met Hawk through our work together at an environmentally-focused summer camp in western N.C. His roles at camp are storyteller and instructor in the "Pioneer Cabin," a replica of a one-room, 19th-century Appalachian cabin. What piqued my interest in his Charleston home was an afternoon at the Pioneer Cabin when he was offering pecans from the gardens that surround his "bed no breakfast." I imagined that the Hawk that manages a boutique lodging establishment in downtown Charleston must be quite different from the Hawk that I knew at the Pioneer Cabin. With my curiosity fuelled by the edible nuts that might place his home into my loosely defined category of contemporary homestead, I wanted to know more.

The following summer, Hawk and his wife, Ayal, welcomed me to their home, revealing a house and garden that is indeed, in many ways, a stark contrast to the Pioneer Cabin at camp. The house is a 3,000 square-foot craftsman-style bungalow that Hawk and Ayal bring to life with art and treasures collected from near and far. The couple grows the least amount of food at home of the five consultants; a few fruit and nut trees are their only

edible plants. But their well-tended garden is of utmost importance to them. This space not only commemorates Ayal's brother (they used the money from his estate to install the garden), but also serves as an essential asset to the bed no breakfast, Ayal's healing business, and Hawk's flute-making. In these ways, their home and garden are immensely productive spaces.

We ate blueberry waffles and scrambled eggs on the front porch while Hawk and Ayal told me stories. They once owned a summer camp in western North Carolina, but a serious illness from contaminated water forced them to re-locate. A lucky tax-free exchange between the two businesses (the camp and the bed no breakfast) enabled the purchase of their large, historic home blocks from Charleston's famed historic and commercial attractions. "Spirit told us there would be a niche [in Charleston]," Ayal tells me, narrating their story of moving from relative material poverty to relative wealth; "we've come from living in a teepee when we started out to . . ." "To a little tiny Appalachian cabin that rats were running through, literally," Hawk chimes in. "To then renting. Then we bought our land . . . and then we came here," Ayal finishes (2013).

Their trajectory evokes the pasts that they imagine. Indigenous and Appalachian art and symbolism permeate their home and garden and their stories, as the tepee and cabin do in their account of their homes together. Hawk and Ayal told me a story about a Scandinavian woman—an art gallery owner—who once said of their house: "I love your home; it's so tribal." Laughing, Ayal repeats the woman's iteration: "It's very tribal" (2013).

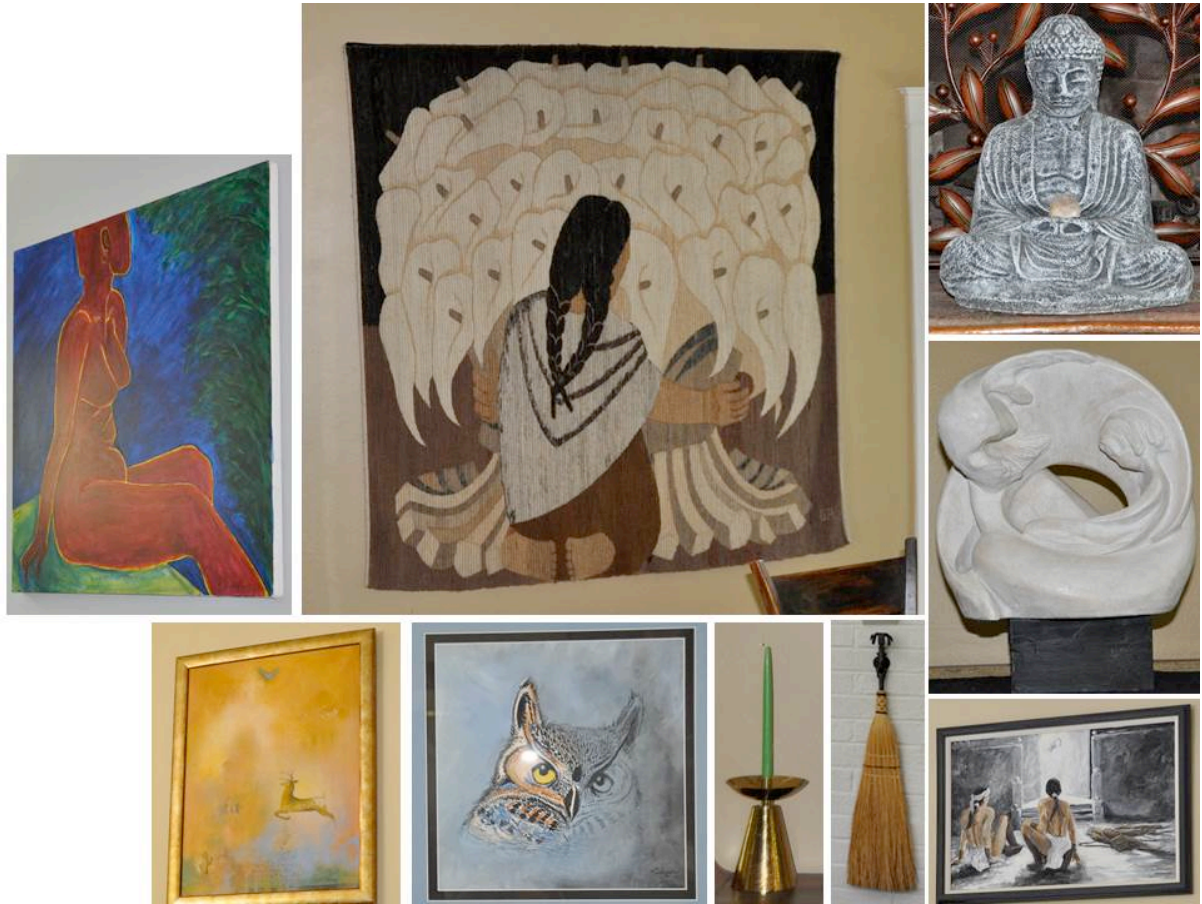


Figure 8: A selection of the art and artefacts that fill the Hursts home; taken together they evoke a nostalgia for an indigenous past but also reference the future that Hawk and Ayal envision, one where each ‘dances to her own beat.’



Figure 9: A selection of the objects that fill the Hursts garden. Like the art in their home, the aesthetic of these objects in the garden do not speak to one tradition in particular, but rather capture the connectedness to nature and spirituality that is so essential to the couple's philosophy.

“Tribal,” a label applied by the woman visiting their home but yet a term that is amendable to the Hursts, evokes another time and place, one where an indigenous relationship with the world pervades. This imagined past permeates Hawk's work as well. He shared a stack of thank-you notes from one of the elementary school classrooms where he had recently told a story. He had given many of the children indigenous names in jest: “she who walks in beauty,” for instance, and “girl who runs with rabbits” (2013). One of the children described Hawk as “Indian awesome” in his thank you note, a label that Hawk earns by making and playing Native American flutes, telling stories from various indigenous tribes, and teaching traditional gourd crafts. Hawk and Ayal's past—both real and imagined—thus

encompasses both the “Appalachian cabin” and a North American indigenous history, both replete with their respective romantic themes of self-sufficiency and connectedness to nature.

If their past is thus located, how do Hawk and Ayal position their vision for the future? “We remind each other: ‘Walk your talk.’ We teach creating your own reality,” Ayal says, “so walk your talk! We can create anything!” (2013). The future they envision is one where people realize their abilities and dreams in a pattern that reverberates with “the beat of the earth.” As Ayal says, “you got to have a sense of your own rhythm; otherwise you get lost You have to be able to dance on your own” (2013). This syncopated magic would yield art and cooperation on many levels, creating something akin to the “small village feeling” that Hawk and Ayal ascribe to the street on which they live, where neighbors love and support one another while each pursuing their own dreams. In this sense, they share a vision with Farson, where the future is framed in terms of faith and potentiality rather than in the specifics of ecological sustainability.

Hawk and Ayal complete the group of five families with whom I worked. As I have said, the time with each consultant was deeply enjoyable, as was the time I spent transcribing and analyzing our conversations, listening for connections and overlaps. An imagined past and envisioned future emerged as essential elements of these contemporary homesteaders’ narratives, though clearly the specific pasts and futures varied widely from consultant to consultant, both in location and in specificity. For some consultants the temporal bookends of their homestead are more amorphous, while for others these visions are quite targeted. And yet all of these homesteaders use a nostalgia for the past to critically inform and point to a better future, one that, for some, almost re-creates the past, while for others builds on it to achieve a new evolutionary place.

Chapter 4: The Homestead and the South

The fact that all of these homesteads are located in the South, and that some of the invoked pasts point to a specifically southern heritage, lends additional texture to this community's shared story. As I have described, contemporary homesteading is a chapter in a much longer history of American back-to-the-land movements (Brown 2011); undoubtedly, this movement has been uniquely interpreted in the American South (Ferris forthcoming). Yet these five consultants do not offer an iteration of the contemporary movement that is overtly southern. Born and raised in other places, as Paz-Wisniewski, Hollis, and the Hursts were, and inspired by time abroad and by nationally and internationally-known thinkers from outside the South, these contemporary homesteaders reflect a region that is increasingly global and connected.⁵

And yet, the spaces of my consultants are almost inescapably marked as southern. The pasts where these contemporary homesteaders root their 21st century landscapes are characteristically southern in both real and imagined ways. Paz-Wisniewski, for example, is installing her Chatham County sustainable agriculture project in the very soil that once supported a classic Piedmont tobacco farm; the same is true of the community where Grizzle first played with ideas of self-sufficiency, Potluck Farm. The land's previous role in the employ of this classic Carolina crop plays a prominent role in the narratives of these spaces,

⁵For an excellent discussion of the increasingly connected and global South, see anthropologist James Peacock (2002) and "The Global South" issue of *Southern Cultures*, including essays by Harry Watson (2007), Carl Bankston (2007), and Peter Coclanis and Louis Kyriakoudes (2007).

bringing a legitimacy of place to the contemporary projects that occupy the spaces today. And beyond the actual pasts of these homesteaders' landscapes, as I have discussed, their imagined pasts also root them deeply in this region. Hollis, Farson, and Hawk Hurst, for instance, consistently uphold a southern Appalachian past as they go about their 21st century homesteading.

Beyond the land and the imaginings it conjures, the buildings that this group inhabits are themselves characteristically southern, a design choice whose intentionality shines through the architecture. Farson's downtown home, for example, was rebuilt to honor the mill house that once stood in its place; it evokes a placed past right down to its diagonally-paned windows (carefully re-created for the rebuilt home), with Farson even saving the original glass panes for the potting shed that she will build this year. The small barn that Grizzle built on his nano-farm is similarly evocative, nodding to a Piedmont farming past, though in miniature (or perhaps I should say in nano). Many of the buildings at Mountain Gardens, like Grizzle's barn, were built largely by hand and echo local traditions in shape, building material, and inspiration; indeed, Hollis constructed the very first cabin there by working from the *Foxfire* texts, the first volume of which carries the subtitle *Hog dressing, log cabin building, mountain crafts and foods, planting by the signs, snake lore, hunting tales, faith healing, moonshining, and other affairs of plain living* (1972).



Figure 10: Hollis's current home and Grizzle's nano-barn. Hollis constructed this home after completing his first cabin; here he applied lessons learned and expanded in size, though the home still strongly evokes an Appalachian building tradition with its porches, pitched roof, square shape, and simple wooden construction (image from Mountain Gardens website, Hollis n.d.). The architecture of Grizzle's barn also evokes a regionally-specific past, the structure reminiscent of the Piedmont barns of the twentieth century with its vertical planking and double doors.

Hollis described building his first cabin, the one that preceded the house pictured here, to a group of his apprentices during the first of a series of talks on the philosophy and history of Mountain Gardens:

I set up a tent and just lived in it. I started cutting down trees and learning how to run a chainsaw, which was scary. It was kind of an initiation: I was sawing down trees and I was going to build this house out of the *Foxfire* book, a log cabin with trees. . . . I made some progress on the cabin—hewing the logs was the fun part—but I got to the roof part and I got hung up. I wanted to do it all out of saplings, which look really straight when you are standing on the ground looking at them, but you get them up and there and try to make a roof out of them, they really aren't exactly that straight! I got really hung up on that. . . . And then there were all the logs laid out there [Hollis indicates the area outside the structure where they sat during this explanation] that I was hewing for the cabin. And then for a while there was this whole superstructure for the roof that I was trying to make on the ground. And then [I] put it up there before I finally gave up and bought 2x6s from the supply store. (Hollis 2013c)

Hollis's narration illuminates how contemporary homesteaders in the American South do more than just inhabit buildings that are regional in design; my consultants also dwell in southern traditions. Just as Hollis insisted on hewing and notching logs in a manner rooted in the mountain South, the Hursts inhabit a set of traditions that characterize the Charleston peninsula. After I voiced admiration for their home, they explained that their house is on a number of architectural walking tours designed by the College of Charleston because of its unique design features. Though the home itself is built in the California bungalow style, it thrives in an environment where homes are held as display pieces, passed carefully through families, and maintained for both public and private consumption. They told me this story about their home:

Ayal (AH): And we had a really interesting thing happen. We're the third family out of 80-plus years to own this place. And we got a call one day; this guy calls up . . .

Hawk (HH): It was about 6 months after we had it.

AH: Yeah, it wasn't very long. And he said, "My name is so and so, don't hang up, I'm not a telemarketer. . . ," because I was getting ready [to hang up] . . .

HH: Thick Alabama accent . . .

AH: He said, "I wanted to tell you that my wife used to come and visit your house. She was the cousin or the niece of the people that lived here. . . . And we're going to come to town and [my wife] really wants to see it again. Would that be okay? And we have something for you."

AH: And we say, "sure." So they come. And they have the original architectural blueprints of this place. . . . [Those blueprints] came to us! We thought, "wow!" (H. Hurst and Hurst 2013)

I include this anecdote at length because it captures the way that the Hursts inhabit this particular southern tradition in a way that is unavoidable: "Don't hang up!" cries the man on the phone. The South imbues not only the physical spaces that are bought and transformed and the traditions in which contemporary homesteaders dwell, as in the case of this anecdote

about the Hursts' showpiece home, but also the decision-making that leads to their initial creation. This is true for Hollis's Mountain Gardens, where the homestead's location is about an evoked southern heritage; it is also true for Paz-Wisniewski's farm, where a particular regional history determined its eventual location.

Paz-Wisniewski described to me how she grapples with the role of a small-scale farmer in a South deeply scarred by racial tension: "My husband and I always said, 'So what if we went into an urban area and started a farm?'" We were driving in her mini-van through Chatham County and our conversation was about urban versus rural farming. "There was an opportunity in Durham at one point," she continued:

But I'm this white woman from nowhere in the middle of their community. How would that work? How could that happen? That's a real life situation. [I would] really have to work on that. I'm not saying it's impossible, not at all. It could work, but I think it would take a lot of finesse and a lot of creativity. (Paz-Wisniewski 2013b)

Paz-Wisniewski, like each of my consultants, is charting a course through an American South that is deeply marred by the ugly realities of our political and cultural histories. She must consider, in ways that might not apply to homesteaders in other regions, how her race and class shape what is and is not feasible. "I'd love to be Will Allen," she told me, invoking the famed African American urban agriculture guru of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who is single-handedly leading the charge to re-imagine inner-city landscapes across America. Acknowledging the realities of life in North Carolina today though, she continued: "But I'm not" (2013a). Paz-Wisniewski opts instead for a more culturally sensitive place from which to work.

Yet another way that the South is pervasive in these homesteading decisions is Paz-Wisniewski's sales model during the summer of 2013: she set up a roadside stand in Briar

Chapel to sell her blueberries, evoking another iteration of farming that squarely places her contemporary homestead in the South.

And thus these homesteads are marked as southern, not because those who tend them are necessarily southern (though some are), but in more textured and nuanced ways. In a region that is globally connected, the contemporary homestead is at times rooted in an imagined southern past and at times rooted in soils that have supported real southern crops. My consultants dwell in homes that evoke an architecture of the South and work from barns that do the same. They participate in living traditions unique to the South, make decisions based on our racialized history, and choose economic models that speak to the region. They are not *southern*, and yet they are southern.

Chapter 5: Situating the Contemporary Homestead

Just as my consultants' landscapes are marked as southern, they are also distinctly American. The contemporary homestead reaches, as do so many other homes and landscapes in this country, for the American Dream. That phrase, 'American Dream,' is often attributed to James Truslow Adams in his *The Epic of America* (1931), who used it to capture ideas of freedom, prosperity, and upward social mobility achieved through hard work: the "dream [is] of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for man. . . . It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret," wrote Adams, as it is "a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (1931, 404). Adam's writing captures the temporal poles of the American Dream, one that is rooted in eschewing a European past and that strives for a uniquely American future.

Landscape scholar Dolores Hayden deepens a discussion about the dream by referencing the "double-dream," house plus neighborhood sociability or house set in unspoiled nature, and the "triple dream," house plus land plus community (2004, 7–9). Hayden posits that the suburbs are the place where the triple dream lives, "encompass[ing] both the private and public pleasures of peaceful, small-scale" living (2004, 8).

This sentiment, however, rings true for *all* of my consultants, whose homesteads traverse urban (the Hursts), suburban (Farson, Grizzle, Paz-Wisniewski), and rural (Hollis)

landscapes. The homestead, like the suburbs, is “a landscape of the imagination where Americans situate ambitions for . . . economic security, ideals about freedom and private property, and longings for social harmony and spiritual uplift” (Hayden 2004, 3). Hayden suggests that this landscape is essentially unattainable. The contemporary homesteaders of my project would concur with this assertion. The homestead, like the American Dream, seems to always fall short; the envisioned home economics do not work and/or there is too much or too little land and/or no community materializes, forcing a reckoning with the gaps.

This forced reckoning with the gaps is an element of homesteading that has long required attention. The back-to-the-land movement has always been plagued by ironies and gaps. One irony that historian Dona Brown and spirituality scholar Rebecca Kneale Gould both identify is that homesteaders have produced, in Brown’s words, “as many texts as vegetables,” with the writing, rather than some other declared cash crop, supporting homesteading ventures from the late 19th century through today (Brown 2011, 12). True to form for generations of homesteaders, the visions that my consultants describe do not entirely align with the realities of their life on (and in) the ground. I offer Grizzle as an example.

“We try to live simply,” asserts Grizzle as he describes the rather complex system he and his family have constructed to move around Chapel Hill and beyond. Primary is walking and bicycling, he explains, and then the city bus; next there is a Vespa scooter, a 1980s pick-up truck, and a vintage 5-seat Datsun, used only when necessary and in that order. The goal is to minimize the carbon emissions from their family of five while still meeting their needs.

Ideally, in his opinion, Grizzle and his family would make no carbon emissions. The collapse of our industrial systems that Grizzle imagines within his lifetime undergirds the two tenets around which he structures his life: contribute as little as possible to causing the

collapse, and be prepared to live in a post-collapse world. On the late March afternoon when he explained the variety of transportation modes, a load of laundry was drying on the line and firewood was stacked by the front door for the woodstove. The apple, pear, and persimmon trees in the backyard were putting on spring growth and winter turnips and lettuces were about to come out of the vegetable garden to make room for spring peas and spinaches. The clucking of the egg-laying hens contributed pleasant, if unexpected, background noise to our recorded interview that afternoon. Despite these efforts, Grizzle and his family still emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, making them active, if reluctant, players in the planetary climate change game.

Grizzle is the first to admit the grim irony of his work for big pharmaceutical companies underwriting the tens of thousands of dollars he has spent establishing his nano-farm. He is the first to critique his occasional use of the Datsun, cognizant that driving it emits significant amounts of carbon and contributes to the looming collapse he envisions. Grizzle, like other contemporary homesteaders, negotiates a workable balance between vision and practicality. He talks about the Datsun and the pickup, but he also talks about his solar-powered well, which he envisions as a resource for the community during and after the collapse. Though his house is connected to city water and sewer service, he installed the well with a hand-pump for backup, and suspects it will be one of the neighbourhood's most valuable resources post-collapse. Grizzle critically addresses the ironies and gaps implicit in the homestead.

The other consultants are equally attuned to the gaps between their visions and applications, critical of their homesteads and real-time realities. Paz-Wisniewski wrings her hands over the fact that she is, at present, more of a consumer than a producer; Hollis pines

for Mountain Gardens to be the exemplary model he knows it could be; and Farson feels that her homesteading visions remain in the realm of “aspiration,” limited by proximate neighbors (Farson 2013a).⁶ When I asked about these gaps, I was taken by the acuity and grace with which contemporary homesteaders narrate them.

“My work gets in the way of personal life!” jokes Grizzle as we walk through his nano-farm on a May morning a few months after he had explained their family’s transportation system (2013b). Although he was referencing garden beds that had not yet been planted with summer crops, his tone captured the general light-heartedness with which contemporary homesteaders talk about the gaps between the ideal and the actual. Grizzle’s joke, though, is hardly a joking matter. It cuts straight to the crux of the movement: how do homesteaders balance the need for cash with their politically-, socially-, ecologically-, and/or spiritually-focused vision? “Although our goal,” writes Hollis in an online essay, “is to detach ourselves from the [monetary] economy, and reattach our lives to the local ecosystem and Gaia, we still have to earn some money for the food we can’t grow, phone [service], taxes, tools, and supplies” (2013a). Paz-Wisniewski echoes the same sentiment in one of our interviews: “There’s a lot of feel-good stuff about farming, a lot of really cool stuff. But I’m also interested in making money; I have to be sustainable” (2013b).

Buried in these comments is a more provocative question about how contemporary homesteaders can and should straddle two worlds. How does one successfully live as a homesteader while remaining one who lives a middle-class or higher life in 21st century

⁶It is essential to note that attention to the gaps and ironies are instigated by the contemporary homesteader and not by me. As a newcomer to their homesteading projects, I was deeply impressed by how my consultants align their homes and gardens with their philosophies and values. I was inspired by the productivity of the Hursts’ urban oasis, astonished by the possibilities of suburban landscapes that Grizzle, Paz-Wisniewski, and Farson demonstrate, and amazed by the complex simplicity of life at Mountain Gardens.

America? This is not a new question; generations of homesteaders have faced the same issues. Homesteaders have wanted “Good housing with earth to dig in, a chance to garden, elbow room, a wholesome and beautiful place in which to rear children—such things are good and widely desired. But they do not function as a substitute for an adequate cash income and security of employment” wrote two government employees of subsistence homesteads in 1924 (Lord and Johnstone 1924, 184, in Brown 2011, 7).

Performance, it seems, has long been a feature of the movement. Yet the context of the *contemporary* homestead—its temporal orientation toward both present and past, and its new urban and suburban and virtual locations⁷—suggests particular types of performances and particular types of audiences. Before I dig into this performative dimension, though, let me step back and address performance as a disciplinary concept in Folklore Studies.

Performance theory centers on the idea that the ways in which a person or group—the performer(s)—convey meaning are important, as are the ways in which the performer’s audience interacts with and reacts to the performer. Given the contemporary definition of folklore as artistic communication in small groups (Ben-Amos 1972), performance theory focuses on the inter-relationships between *all* elements of expressive culture (no longer limited to previously foregrounded stories and songs), rendering home and garden as relevant places for analysis.

⁷The conversation about why and how to homestead that happens on the internet is a significant aspect of the contemporary movement, one in which the popularity of a blog like Kelly Coyne and Erik Knutzen’s *Root Simple* (2014) can lead to the publication of books like their *Making It: Radical Home Ec for a Post Consumer World* (Coyne and Knutzen 2010a) and *The Urban Homestead: Your Guide to Self-Sufficient Living in the Heart of the City* (Coyne and Knutzen 2010b), all valuable 21st century cash crops fuelled by a virtual network of connection and communication. Though I address this aspect of the contemporary homestead briefly in the discussion of audience that follows, it is an area ripe for further investigation and analysis.

Folklorist Deborah Kapchan's chapter in *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture* is particularly helpful in understanding performance theory's position within folkloristics today. She writes, "Performance is public; it needs an audience, whether that audience be a group of theatregoers, a single child, or an invisible spirit. Performance assumes community and communication" (Kapchan 2003, 130).

My fieldwork revealed two types of performance for the contemporary homesteader: performance as sustenance, and performance as outreach. The first is undertaken for financial stability, the second for proselytizing. Hollis's wasabi-growing workshops mentioned above are an example of performance as sustenance. I watched as he welcomed six individuals into his garden on a June Saturday afternoon for a workshop. "These workshops take advantage of our unique combination of diverse habitats, extensive plant collection, extraordinary library and well-equipped herb shop, plus my forty years of study and experimentation," Hollis writes on the registration page. "As a 'botanic garden of useful plants', one of our purposes is to introduce and promote new useful plants, for gardeners, growers, herbalists and chefs. Areas of special interest include wildfoods, medicinal herbs, (native and oriental), health-boosting (tonic, adaptogenic) plants and east-west parallels in botany and pharmacy" (Hollis 2013b). The three-hour workshop posited Hollis as storyteller, teacher, and medicine man to the workshop participants (who had come from as far as Florida and paid \$50 each for the opportunity) and a smattering of apprentices; that afternoon, they followed him on foot up the mountain into Pisgah National Forest, and then down again to the creek at the bottom of the valley as he described the art and craft of growing this traditional Japanese mountain crop that likes its roots near streams and currently fetches a high dollar from upscale American restaurants as a wild food novelty.

I watched the Hursts give another type of performance for sustenance when an elderly bed no breakfast guest named Charlie interrupted our tour of the side yard to ask for an extra room key. Ayal and I continued our tour as the miniature parking lot became Hawk's stage. Nearly half an hour later as I prepared to depart, Hawk was still deep in conversation, at that point animatedly giving Charlie restaurant recommendations. These sorts of performances for sustenance, whether planned like Hollis's workshops and Paz-Wisniewski's road-side and market stands, or impromptu but expected, like the Hursts response to their clientele's needs, are an essential part of their 21st century cash crops.

Hollis's webpage, a maze of philosophical ramblings, scholarly essays, invitations to apprentice at Mountain Gardens, and plants and workshops for sale, bridges the two types of performance, serving as both a place of economic transaction and a stage for outreach (1990; 2013e). The latter foregrounds the proselytizing sort of performance, one that contemporary homesteaders undertake to share their mission and vision with the world. These performances take a number of shapes and sizes, reach audiences large and small, and offer at once the successes *and* failures of the homestead so that audience members might use the homesteaders' mistakes as launching pads in their own application of the vision. They are central to the contemporary homestead's mission; as Hollis said, "If I didn't think the world was in a hell of a mess, I would just be making my garden. I would not be spending my time on a lot of outreach" (2013d).

Grizzle, like Hollis, undertakes this sort of performance at times on the ground and at times in the virtual realm, his audience an unknown. Grizzle's blog, a relatively short-lived project entitled *Suburban Nano Farming* and written while he lived abroad (and had no backyard nano-farm in which to putter), espouses the benefits of tending backyard poultry,

establishing water security, and encouraging pollinators (2011a; 2011b; 2011c). In a post entitled “Keeping Chickens Makes Sense,” Grizzle writes with the sort of proselytizing undertone that characterizes performance-as-outreach:

It is a fact that planet earth is getting warmer. An international scientific consensus has been reached that global climate change is real, and that the warmer temperatures are the direct result of human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels. . . . Human activities got us into this mess, and so human activities will need to change. Knowing this, one is naturally left wondering what one can do to change our lives so we emit less carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. (2011b)

Next he offers chicken-husbandry as one of his nano-farming successes:

Much carbon is emitted in the production and transportation of foods from distant locations. There is a movement underway to eat more locally . . . [and] we can all begin moving in that general direction. The possibility of keeping chickens in order to eat more locally is one strategy that can be easily adopted. . . . Eggs from backyard chickens will spoil your taste buds! Store-bought eggs soon become a last resort (2011b)

And then he cautions his audience to avoid particular pitfalls:

There are numerous diseases and parasites that can decimate your flock, some of which can be transmitted to humans It’s a good habit to wash hands before and after gathering eggs or handling your chickens. [And] a discussion of chickens would not be complete without mention of chicken poop. An average sized hen can produce about a cubic foot of manure every 6 months. . . . Un-composted chicken manure is too strong to use as plant fertilizer because it could harm roots and possibly kill the plant, but once composted, it is black gold! (2011b)

Grizzle concludes his web-based performance by going back to his philosophy and vision:

Al Gore was not overstating the issue when he said that global climate change constitutes the greatest challenge ever to face humankind. The time for change is upon us. . . . Keeping your own chickens . . . is but one way to begin our societal transition to whatever lies ahead. (2011b)

Here Grizzle crafts an instruction manual as he goes, such that others may use this performance as a launching pad.

Farson described another version of this type of performance when she conveyed the pleasure she takes as other people enjoy the beauty of her garden (2013b). Yet a third example of this sort of performative dimension of the homestead is evident in Paz-Wisniewski's account of a meeting with county planners about her proposed farm:

I had no idea the number of people that were going to be there and what [the meeting] was going to be all about. The [county employee had] just said, "C'mon, we'll just have some people and we can talk about what you're going to need to do." My sister and I were in the waiting room [and then a] lady comes and gets us and we walk down this hallway. We come around the corner and there's this U-shaped table with about 15 or 20 people at it. And then there's an overhead project with my farm pictured on it with the [proposed] layout up on the screen and then next to it is a survey [of the property]. And I [think] "What the . . . ?!" [My sister and I start] making jokes: "We feel like we should be performing here, doing a dance in the middle [of the room]." It was *really* overwhelming. (Paz-Wisniewski 2013b)

Here Paz-Wisniewski is required to offer outreach to a group not necessarily interested in homesteading, an element that occasionally characterizes the audience of a contemporary homesteader's performance.

As I have suggested, these two types of performances, and the variety of forms they take, present a range of audiences for the contemporary homestead. There are the audiences with whom the homesteader interacts one-on-one and in groups, both for the short-term, as in the case of the Hursts' bed no breakfast visitor, and the long-term, as in the case of Hollis's apprentices and Farson's neighbors. There are the audiences that witness a homestead but never speak with its caretaker, as in Farson's case, where she gardens for those walking in downtown Davidson. And then there are the potential audiences, who do or do not materialize, like the readership of Grizzle's and Hollis's virtual publications.

Ayal Hurst described another sort of potential audience when she told me about a woman who works near their Charleston home who asked about the possibility of visiting the garden on her lunch break: "One woman asked if she could just come by on her break and

just sit here in the cactus garden. She never has, but she asked if she could. The beauty of that is that you never know how [you or I, just] one person . . . [can] affect things beautifully and might not ever see it” (H. Hurst and Hurst 2013).

Ayal is acutely aware of the potential audiences that surround her at any given moment. Paz-Wisniewski named her interaction with the county board as a performance. Both denote the contemporary homesteader once again as savvy and critical. Just as today’s homesteader can identify the ironies and gaps between vision and application and navigate the tensions implicit in these gaps, she also carefully plots how and when she will draw back the curtains on her home and garden. Furthermore, the performances themselves become a *means* of navigating the gaps, in terms of both bringing in extra financial resources and enacting the outreach that’s so much a part of the vision. As such, the homesteader’s performance is a tool for straddling multiple worlds.

Life in the present moment on a contemporary homestead—positioned between an imagined past and envisioned future, and marked by performances that situate one foot in the homestead and the other in 21st century America—seems not just a messy undertaking, but also one that is often very trying. This difficulty was foregrounded one August morning as Paz-Wisniewski and I sat in her kitchen after touring the backyard-in-transition of her suburban North Raleigh home, and I complimented her homestead. I was amazed at the fruit, vegetable, fish, and egg production that she fits into a tiny outdoor space, and at her tidy and welcoming aesthetic. As I said this, Paz-Wisniewski qualified her thanks with this comment: “It makes me feel a little uncomfortable to talk about [the progress of my farm/homestead], but it is good because it reminds me where I came from, [though] I wish I was further. I really do” (2013a). The future Paz-Wisniewski envisions presses down on her, quite

“uncomfortably” at times. I heard this discomfort about the homestead in the present moment and the pressure of the future from many of my consultants, with the line from Hollis with which I opened this thesis echoing from one homestead to the next: “[the paradise garden] is a goal that’s out there in the very, very far distance” (2013d).

An explanation from Ayal articulates well how contemporary homesteaders navigate this discomfort: “We’re stretching . . . You keep stretching. It’s like yoga; you keep stretching yourself to be able to create in better and better ways” (2013). Contemporary homesteading *is* like yoga, always managing a precarious balancing act between past, present, and future. Doing this balancing is an art, an art with a distinct performative dimension; my consultants never ceased to impress me with their abilities as artful keepers of this balance.

They play with this balance and welcome others into their process before everything is steady (which, with the contemporary homestead poised between an imagined past and envisioned future, it will never be). They give tours of their gardens, tell their story again and again in market stands and online, host people in their homes, and share their failures in hopes that others will use their mistakes as launching pads for more successful applications of their visions. In so doing, they are not only enacting the future in their homesteading, but also doing so in instructive ways, crafting instruction manuals, as it were, for others to follow—manuals realized in every act of outreach, whether tours or apprenticeships or writings. They play with this balance, using it to keep their visions alive. “Nothing is impossible in my mind!” says Paz-Wisniewski; “it’s all just levels of complication” (Paz-Wisniewski 2013b). Her sentiment reverberates across the movement, echoing contemporary homesteaders’ fierce dedication to their visions in the face of the inevitable messiness of this

present moment, a character trait that also surfaces in Brown's writings about past generations of back-to-the-landers. This dedication, coupled with the homesteader's ability to critically hold the ironies and gaps while forging ahead, captured my attention and deep respect.

Conclusion

Historian Dona Brown contends that the three generations of homesteaders that preceded the current one looked first forward, and then backward, for information and inspiration. I have argued here that the contemporary homesteader, who inhabits America's fourth wave of this enduring movement, looks, for the first time, both forward *and* backward, critically using nostalgia to imagine a past, and then counter-weighting it with an envisioned future.

These two temporal poles require a balancing act in the present moment, with the impossibility of simultaneously achieving an imagined past and envisioned future nowhere more apparent than on the contemporary homestead. The balancing act is a messy one, and at times, an uncomfortable undertaking, marked by gaps and ironies. Contemporary homesteaders, acutely aware of and critical of these disconnects, utilize the performative dimension of the homestead in taking their 21st century cash crops to market *and* in executing the outreach necessitated by their visions. The audiences for these do-what-it-takes performances—varied in size and shape and form—offer mirrors for the contemporary homesteader as she practices her art form.

The five Carolina families that I have profiled here share an intense commitment and fierce dedication to their homesteads, in what proves to be an on-going struggle to strike some semblance of balance. Their lasting tenure stands as a testament to the power of home and garden as a place from which one can perform a vision for the future. As members of a

current generation of homesteaders, joining a back-to-the-land movement in America that spans more than a century, they imagine a past and envision a future, a bi-directional compass of sorts that grounds their philosophies and work and marks them as unique in their orientation to this enduring dream.

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